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ABSTRACT

This report presents baseline findings from a 3-year study of state exit exams. The study involved data from all states with current or planned exit exams; case studies of five states; and research review. Researchers examined: why so many states are adopting high school exit exams, impacts of exit exams on students, what the exams are like, and challenges states face in implementing exit exams. States adopt exit exams to motivate students to work harder and help teachers identify and address student weaknesses. The students most immediately impacted by exit exams are those who do not pass on the first try. Passing rates are lowest for African American, Hispanic, limited English speaking, and disabled students. Most students pass the test by the time they are ready to graduate. States are moving toward more rigorous exit exams that are better aligned with what students are learning. The exams are starting to incorporate more open-ended questions. Challenges in implementing exit exams include determining where to set the cutoff between passing and failing; ensuring that students have adequate opportunities to learn the material being tested; and determining multiple ways to demonstrate competency. Attachments include case studies from Alaska, Georgia, Indiana, New York, and Ohio and state profiles. (Contains 62 references.) (SM)

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STATE HIGH SCHOOL EXIT EXAMS
A BASELINE REPORT

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Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in January 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is the national independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. We do not represent any special interests. Instead, we help citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.

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Action Summary for State and National Leaders

For a growing number of U.S. high school students, a plain paper test booklet has become a powerful gatekeeper of their future. Currently, 18 states—enrolling half of all public school pupils—require their students to pass exit examinations before they can graduate from high school with a regular diploma. Within the next six years, at least 24 states will have mandatory exit exams, affecting about 7 out of every 10 public school students and 8 out of 10 minority students. (See map on following page.)

This expansion of exit exams can be attributed mostly to standards-based reform, and state policymakers are the main drivers. Standards have given a more solid foundation to the concept of exit exams by laying out what students should know and be able to do by the time they graduate from high school. Standards-based reform has also raised the significance of state tests, both as a yardstick for measuring student progress and as an instrument for holding students and educators accountable for higher performance.

State policymakers have an ongoing responsibility to closely monitor the implementation of exit exams. They must understand the effects of these tests, including any negative or unexpected consequences, so they can address problems or adjust state policies.

National leaders also have strong reasons to keep track of the impacts of exit exams. In January 2002, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act, which will increase the amount of state testing and place even greater weight on state test results. These federal requirements are bound to interact with state exit exam policies, but just how remains to be seen.

This report is intended to help state and national policymakers, media people, and others understand the nature, status, and impact of state exit exams.

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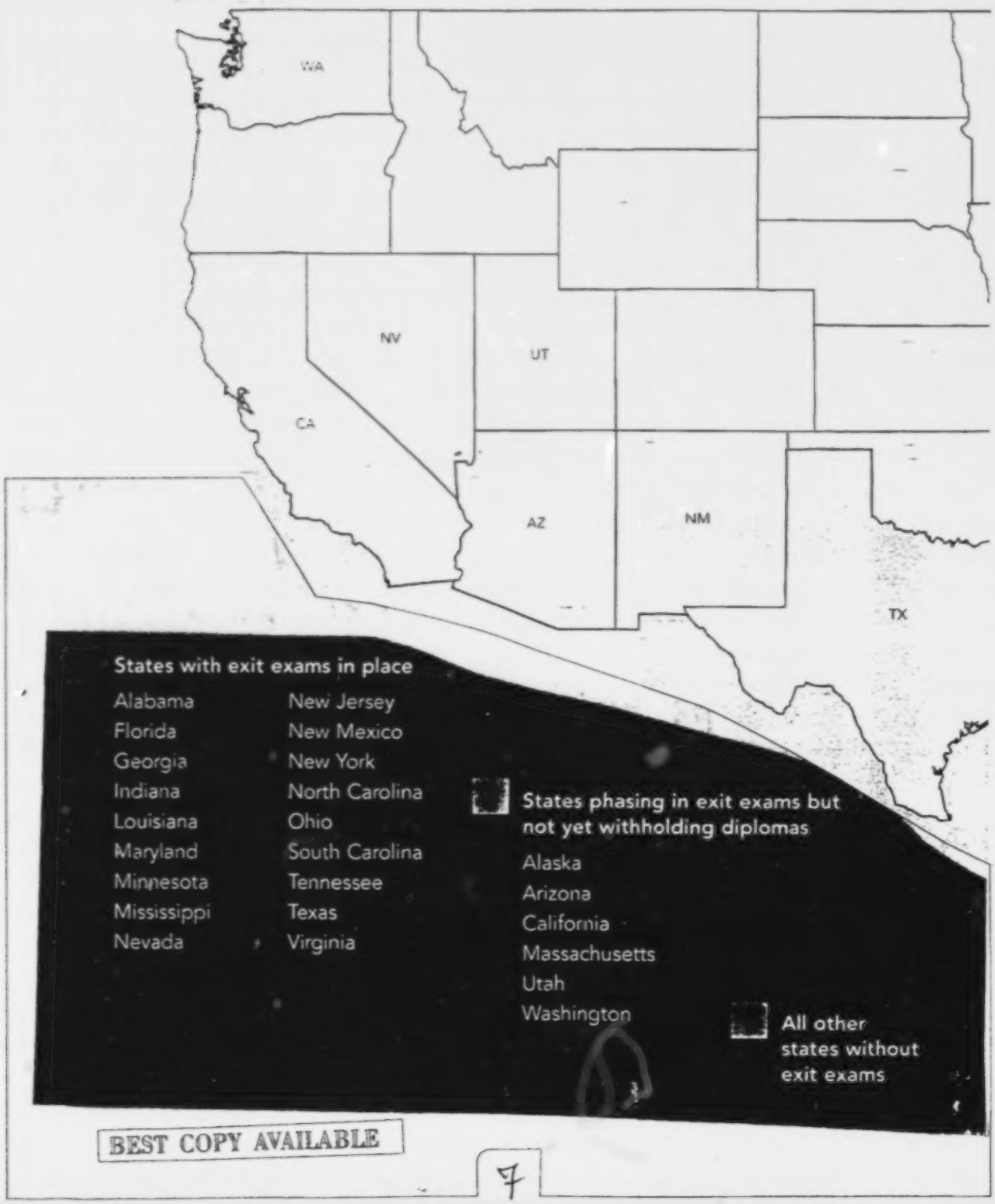
States with Mandatory Exit Exams



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Summary of Key Findings

The Center on Education Policy has begun a three-year study of state exit exams, one of the most comprehensive overviews to date. This report—the first in a series of annual reports—describes our baseline findings. It is drawn from data the Center collected from all of the states with current or planned exit exams, case studies we conducted in five states, and a review of other major research in this field. We looked at four main questions, as follows.

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Question 1

Why are so many states adopting exit exams?

Exit exams are intended to make a diploma "mean something"—namely, that its holder has the knowledge and skills needed to do well in a job, college, or other aspects of daily life. In adopting these tests, state policymakers are responding to citizens' concerns that the quality of public education has slipped and that too many young people are graduating with substandard academic skills. Advocates say these exams will motivate students to work harder and help teachers identify and address student weaknesses. Critics contend, however, that these tests lead to higher dropout rates, place too much weight on a single imperfect measure, and do nothing to ensure that students have an opportunity to learn the material being tested.

Both sides can find support for their view in selected studies of past efforts to reform education through exit exams. Most notably, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, many states adopted minimum competency tests to make sure students could read, write, and compute before they graduated. In general, research on this experience suggests that policymakers should be careful about expecting tests to bring about significant improvements in teaching and learning.

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Question

What are the impacts of exit exams on students?

Exit exams will have a major impact on all U.S. students, especially minority and poor students.

- **The 24 states that have, or will soon have, mandatory exit exams include some of the most populous states and those with higher than average minority enrollments.**
- **States with exit exams also tend to have higher poverty and lower per pupil spending than the national average.**

States are acting somewhat on faith as they move ahead with these exams. Studies of past exit exams offer mixed evidence about whether these tests improve student learning, but they do offer some evidence to justify concerns that these tests are connected with higher dropout rates.

The students most immediately affected by exit exams are those who don't pass on the first try and must retake the test, hopefully after receiving remedial services. In many states, this category includes significant numbers of students—and a disproportionately large share of minority students. If a failure to pass an exit exam on the first try does lead to higher dropout rates or other negative consequences, then African American and Hispanic students will be much more severely affected.

- According to our data, the percentages of students who don't pass exit exams on their first attempt range from 9% to 69% in mathematics, depending on the state, and from 5% to 53% in English/language arts. (These wide differences in passing rates seem to be largely related to variations in the difficulty, characteristics, and implementation years of state tests.)
- **In all states that report passing rates by student subgroups, African American and Hispanic students are much less likely to pass on the initial try than white and Asian American students. In Massachusetts, for example, Asian American and white students were about twice as likely as Hispanic students, and about one and three-quarters times as likely as African American students, to pass the state math exam on the first try. The racial-ethnic gaps are somewhat lower for English/language arts exams but are still alarming.**
- Passing rates are also lower for poor students, students with disabilities, and English language learners. In Minnesota, for example, where 80% of all students passed the reading exit exam on the first try, only 59% of poor students, 40% of students in special education, and 30% of English language learners passed the first time.

The great majority of test-takers do pass exit exams by the time they are ready to graduate. The Center retrieved information on cumulative passing rates from two states, Indiana and Ohio; in both states, approximately 98% of students who completed their course requirements eventually passed the exit exams and received a diploma. Data on cumulative passing rates can be very misleading, however, because the counts of students on which they are based apparently do not include students who drop out in high school, repeat their senior year, move away, or are excluded from testing because of disability or language status.

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Question 3

What are these exams like?

States are moving away from the easier type of minimum competency exams, which are targeted at skills below the high school level, and toward more rigorous types of exit exams that are better aligned with what high schools are supposed to be teaching. These newer types of exams include standards-based exams, which are aligned with state standards at the high school level, and end-of-course exams, which are tied to a specific course and are often more challenging than standards-based exams.

- In 2002, 10 states have minimum competency exams, 7 have standards-based exams, and 2 have end-of-course exams. (Texas administered more than one type of test in 2002.) If states follow through with their current plans, by 2008, only 3 states will have minimum competency exams, while 16 will have standards-based exams and 5 will have end-of-course exams.

English/language arts and mathematics are by far the most tested subjects. All the states with exit exams address these two subjects, although sometimes by different names. Tests in science and social studies are becoming more common. Right now, more than a third of the states with exit exams assess science and/or social studies, but by 2008, this number will increase to more than half of these states.

State exit exams are moving beyond traditional multiple-choice questions to incorporate more open-ended kinds of test questions.

- Fifteen states now include some form of essay writing in their exit exams, and the number is slated to grow to 22 states by 2008.
- The number of states using short answer questions in their exit exams will more than double in the next six years, from 7 to 15.
- Currently only two state exams call on students to perform a more complex task (other than essay writing) or provide an extended response, but by 2008, 7 state exit exams will include these kinds of test items.

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Question

What major challenges do states face in implementing exit exams?

Most states are phasing in their exit exams, allowing several years between the time they introduce the tests and the time they begin withholding diplomas. This is a prudent approach, because already some states are finding they must make adjustments or delay their deadlines to address such issues as unexpectedly high failure rates.

The Center's study identified five issues that are especially critical to the success of state exit exam programs.

FIRST, states are grappling with where to set the cutoff score separating students who pass from those who fail. Tests are not perfect measures, testing experts warn. With any pass/fail test, there will always be some students who score just below the cutoff and others who score just above it, even though their achievement levels don't really differ. Rather, the slight difference in their scores is the result of what testing experts call measurement error—fluctuations in test scores related to such factors as the particular sample of questions on the test, a few lucky guesses, too many distractions in the testing room, or other factors unrelated to the student's understanding of the broader subject being tested.

State policymakers must walk a fine line between setting cutoff scores for exit exams that are high enough to effectively prepare students for life after graduation but reasonable enough to avoid mass failures. States have dealt with these pragmatic concerns in different ways.

- Massachusetts, for example, has a challenging set of exit exams, but the state has set cutoff scores at the bottom, rather than the top, of its "needs improvement" performance category. Students only have to answer 40% of the questions right on each of the language arts and math sections to pass the test.

  Texas raised the cutoff score on its TAAS test from 60% to 70% over a two-year period. Despite controversy over high initial failure rates even at the 60% cutoff, the state went ahead and raised the bar. More than one-fourth of students who took the test with the higher cutoff score initially failed, but through retesting and targeted support, the proportion of students denied diplomas shrank to about 5%.

For exit exams to have meaning, cutoff scores should be tied to concrete standards for what students should know and be able to do by the end of high school. When policymakers set cut scores based primarily on political considerations rather than on meaningful expectations for learning, they undermine the purpose of exit exams.

SECOND, states are often struggling with ensuring that students have an adequate opportunity to learn the material being tested. This issue is central to the fairness of exit exams.

Providing adequate remediation for students who fail exit exams is the most obvious responsibility. Some states are doing a decent job, but others are falling short.

- By some accounts, only half the states with mandatory exit exams also allocate state funds for instructional assistance to students who fail.

Remediation is only part of the picture. To have a meaningful opportunity to learn, stu-

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dents must receive the full range of instructional services and supports necessary for them to meet state standards—throughout their schooling, not just in high school and not just after they fail a test. These supports include well-qualified teachers, effective curriculum aligned with state standards, high-quality instructional materials and equipment, extra learning time or special teaching methods for low-performing students, and other resources.

As part of providing an opportunity to learn, states must also ensure that schools are teaching the knowledge and skills being tested. This is a two-part job. First, states must work backwards, looking at their standards and curriculum from high school down through the middle and elementary grades, to make sure that they are coherent and build logically toward the content represented on the exit exams. Second, states must look beyond their formal curriculum standards and attempt to evaluate the actual curriculum and instruction being delivered in classrooms. This is much harder to judge, because it involves reviewing actual instructional materials and observing teachers teaching in a sample of classrooms, steps that most states haven't taken yet.

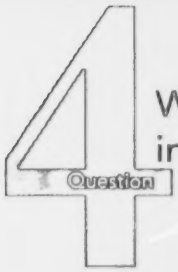
Most studies of exit exams focus on what happens after students take the test, rather than on their experiences beforehand, so little information is available about how well states are providing an opportunity to learn. But research has documented alarming disparities among schools and districts in terms of numbers of well-qualified teachers, per pupil funding, support services, a safe environment, and other important conditions for learning. The persistence of high concentrations of low-performing schools in urban districts and poor rural districts suggests that opportunity to learn is more of a goal than a reality. If state leaders really expect exit exam policies to improve teaching and learning, then they must assume much more responsibility for guaranteeing opportunity to learn. It's hypocritical for states to impose challenging exit exam requirements, and then leave schools, teachers, and students to fend for themselves.

THIRD, states are trying to develop and maintain public and educator support for their exit exam programs. Most parents endorse the concept of exit exams by large margins, but in some states there is a vocal group of parents, students, teachers, and others who oppose these tests. These critics, moreover, often have legitimate concerns about the fairness and appropriateness of exit exam policies that policymakers cannot simply dismiss. Testing backlash can undermine even a well-designed testing program.

In order to keep most of the public behind their testing programs, policymakers must acknowledge and address the criticisms. They must also actively build and maintain public support, through such strategies as forming alliances with business leaders and other supporters of exit exams and mounting public relations campaigns to explain the tests, counter misleading criticisms, and calm some of the opponents.

FOURTH, states must figure out multiple ways for students to demonstrate competency. Testing experts strongly urge that decisions with life-altering consequences, such as whether a student will graduate, should not be made on the basis of a single test score but should take into account other relevant information. Yet exit exams, by their very nature, essentially operate as a single measure. Most states with exit exams require students to satisfactorily complete their coursework *and* pass the exam. For students who finish the coursework but fail the exam, the test alone bars the path to graduation.

The simplest way to make sure that decisions are not based on a single test score is to offer students who fail the test opportunities to retake it. All states with exit exams provide retesting opportunities, anywhere from two to eight. Typically, students take a parallel version of the test with slightly different questions.



What major challenges do states face in implementing exit exams?

In addition, several states have put in place extra policies, exceptions for special cases, or alternative paths to graduation for students who don't pass the exams after repeated tries. These policies operate somewhat like multiple measures, without significantly weakening the exit exam requirement. For example:

- In at least six states, students who complete other graduation requirements but do not pass the test after multiple tries receive a lower-status "certificate of attendance" instead of a diploma. Students usually have additional chances to retake the test after leaving high school in order to obtain a regular diploma.
- At least four states give students the opportunity to graduate without passing exit exams by going through a waiver or appeals process. Students can demonstrate that they've mastered the required knowledge and skills in other ways, such as receiving acceptable grades in key courses or obtaining letters of recommendation from the principal or a teacher in the subject area of the failed exam.
- At least two states, New York and Virginia, allow schools to use substitute tests in place of regular exit exams, including the SAT II, Advanced Placement tests, International Baccalaureate tests, and others.
- At least one state, New Jersey, allows students who have failed exit exams to take a special alternative assessment to graduate.

FIFTH, states are figuring out how to develop fair and effective procedures for testing students with disabilities and English language learners. Federal laws require these students to have access to the general curriculum, whenever appropriate, and to be included in state assessments. The rationale is that unless these students are included in efforts to raise standards, their needs will be too easily ignored and the expectations held for them will be too low.

For some of these students, however, a conventional exit exam may not be a valid measure of what they know and can do. States must also provide students with disabilities and English language learners with appropriate test accommodations—changes in the testing situation that make it possible for these students to participate meaningfully in the test, such as one-on-one or small-group testing; extended testing time; use of magnifying equipment, readers, signers, or transcribers; or students' dictation of their responses. States face some confusion, however, because it is unclear whether certain accommodations change the nature of the competency being tested, and because there is no clear set of criteria to determine which accommodations are appropriate for which students under what conditions. In 2002, 17 states offered accommodations to students with disabilities taking high school exit exams. By 2008, 22 states intend to do so.

In addition, some states offer alternate assessments or exemptions to allow students with disabilities who have difficulty passing exit exams to earn a regular diploma. Our data indicate that 6 states offer exemptions for students with disabilities, and 5 provide alternate assessments. By 2008, the number offering exemptions will decrease to 5, while the number providing alternate assessments will increase to 9. Several states also offer a less than standard diploma, such as a certificate of attendance or completion, to students with special needs, or to all students who do not meet exit exam requirements.

All states with exit exams require English language learners to pass the same tests as other students, with accommodations often provided. In 2002, 15 states offered accommodations to English language learners; by 2008, 18 states will do so. In only 4 states, however, are exit exams (other than English/language arts subtests) translated into other languages, and only one more state plans to add translations by 2008.

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Recommendations for Policymakers

The role of state policymakers should not end once an exit exam is adopted. With the increasing transfer of responsibility for education policy and funding from the local to the state level, state leaders have an ongoing responsibility to ensure the success of the reforms they have enacted. They must also provide the financial and technical assistance to help educators prepare students for the tests and help students pass them.

As noted above, our study has identified several complex issues that state leaders face as they implement exit exams. But we have also uncovered examples of states that seem to be doing a positive job of addressing these and other issues, and are demonstrating that it's possible to be sensitive to public concerns and unexpected developments while implementing a high-stakes test.

Based on these findings, the Center on Education Policy makes the following recommendations for state and national policymakers. We also provide some examples of how some states are handling the issues our recommendations are meant to address.

1. PHASE IN NEW EXIT EXAMS OVER SEVERAL YEARS.

Good tests take time to design, try out, and revise as needed. The consequences for students should be phased in over several years to give students, teachers, and parents enough time to understand what is expected and allow schools enough time to align their curriculum and instruction with the new expectations. States should ensure that schools constructively use these phase-in periods to alter their practices incrementally rather than simply to avoid coping with impending changes.

In 1996, New York began phasing out the Regents Competency Tests, a series of standards-based exit exams, and phasing in

BOX A: RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Phase in new exit exams over several years.
2. Ensure that students have an adequate opportunity to learn the material being tested.
3. Provide sufficient opportunities for remediation.
4. Use exit exams in conjunction with other measures of student performance.
5. Provide adequate funding.
6. Conduct outreach campaigns to build public understanding and support.
7. Monitor the consequences.

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a requirement for all high school students to take the Regents Comprehensive Examinations, a more challenging set of end-of-course exams that previously had been used only to grant the more prestigious Regents Diploma.

To give students and school districts time to adapt, the state developed a three-year timetable. The new requirements began to take effect on a limited scale with the freshman class of 1996 and would be fully implemented with the freshman class of 1999. Under this schedule, a student who entered high school as a freshman in 1996 would have to pass the Regents Comprehensive examination in English plus four Regents Competency Tests in order to graduate. A student who entered high school in 1999 will have to pass five Regents Comprehensive Examinations before graduating, those in English, Mathematics, Global History and Geography, United States History and Government, and Science.

The cutoff scores on the Regents exams are also gradually rising to give students time to adjust. During the first two to four years that an exam is required (the period varies by subject), local districts may set a passing score of 55. After this initial period, the passing score will be 65 on all the exams across all districts in the state.

2. **ENSURE THAT STUDENTS HAVE AN ADEQUATE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN THE MATERIAL BEING TESTED.**
Students should not be punished because they don't know what their schools never taught them. States must take more active steps to guarantee that students in all schools, especially those in low-income areas, are provided with well-qualified teachers and effective curriculum and instruction before the test is given. Opportunity to learn does not begin in high school, but rather is a responsibility shared between the state and educators in grades K through 12.

Although states are generally far from achieving true opportunity to learn, some states are making progress in developing a coherent and well-aligned system of standards, curriculum, and tests, beginning in the early elementary grades and ending in late high school.

3. **PROVIDE SUFFICIENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR REMEDIATION.**
The goal of exit exams is to help students learn more, not to drive them out of the school system. States should ensure that students who fail the test receive adequate remediation. This could include special classroom instructional programs, tutoring, summer school, after-school programs, and other options. Even more important, states should help schools develop the data systems necessary to identify students at risk of failing state exams so assistance can be provided to them before they fail.

In Alabama, the governor's "High Hopes" initiative authorized $6 million in 2000 for remediation for students who don't pass state exit exams. Each district receives an allotment based on its number of students who have failed the exams. Local district councils, composed of the superintendent, educators, parents, students, institutions of higher education, and community-based organizations, design a comprehensive plan for providing remedial services. Remediation may be provided after school, during the summer, or during classroom time, but should not take the place of regular instruction.

4. USE EXIT EXAMS IN CONJUNCTION WITH OTHER MEASURES OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE.

Exit exams should not be used as the sole criterion for deciding whether to grant a high school diploma. Students who repeatedly fail the tests should have at least one other method for demonstrating what they know and can do. These alternatives might include waivers or substitute tests; collections of student work judged by an external panel using standards that are comparable in difficulty to the state test; written recommendations from teachers in core academic subjects; or good grades and good attendance in a rigorous curriculum. And as a total alternative to mandatory exit exams, some states have instituted graduation testing policies with lower stakes; for example, instead of denying students a diploma, states may award a special category of advanced diploma to students who do well on the exit exams, or encourage school districts to note students' exit exams scores on their high school transcripts so employers or college admissions officials could factor them into decisions.

Indiana offers two alternate pathways to a diploma for students who repeatedly fail state exit exams. First, a student can receive an Indiana diploma by completing all components of the Core 40 curriculum, a more rigorous series of academic courses than the basic curriculum, with a C or higher in each course. Second, a student may graduate through an appeals process if he or she meets several requirements, which include retaking the failed exams multiple times, completing remediation, maintaining an excellent attendance record, maintaining acceptable grades in required courses, obtaining written teacher recommendations, and satisfying other graduation requirements. These alternatives are generally considered to be more challenging than the exit exams and are not widely used. Indiana reports that 98.5% of the students in the class of 2000 who completed all their required courses received diplomas. Of these students, 93.7% earned a diploma by passing the state test, 4.6% through the appeals process, and 0.2 % through the Core 40 Waiver.

5. PROVIDE ADEQUATE FUNDING.

It is not enough for policymakers to simply implement rigorous exit exams. For these tests to have any real chance of succeeding, they must be accompanied by a variety of meaningful supports—all of which cost money. States must provide school districts with adequate funding for teacher and administrator professional development, effective instructional materials tied to state standards, remedial programs for students, test data analysis to inform instruction, and other activities.

Alaska has used accountability results to push for more funding for education. In February 2001, a governor-appointed Education Funding Task Force reported that the state's education system was not adequately funded for students to meet the standards of the state's accountability system. The task force recommended that the state spend an additional $100 million over the next five years on direct instructional intervention for students not meeting the standards, teacher salary increases, facilities maintenance, curriculum alignment, additional aid to low-performing schools, updated instructional materials, and other goals. The task force estimated that the first year of the plan would cost over $42 million to implement. The state legislature ultimately allocated $28 million for these programs and services for fiscal year 2002.

6. CONDUCT OUTREACH CAMPAIGNS TO BUILD PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT.

States should make information about exit exams readily available to students, parents, and other citizens in an easy-to-understand form, through the media, the Internet, town meetings, and other strategies. To ensure that exams meet the needs of stakeholder groups, states need comprehensive strategies for working with parent groups, teachers' unions, local businesses and employers, colleges and universities, and other community-based groups.

Through a combination of committed state leadership and consistent support from the state's business community, Maryland has successfully maintained its standards-based reforms despite turnover in key people. The Maryland Business Round Table has been a particularly helpful partner. This group has conducted campaigns for several years aimed at raising student achievement. One statewide effort encourages employers to ask students for their high school transcripts as part of the hiring process. Although diplomas will not be withheld based on exit exams for several more years, students' scores on the high school tests are reported on all student transcripts, so potential employers can see them. The program also includes a public relations campaign to convince students of the importance of high achievement, and an employer-based campaign to inform employees who are parents about education reform efforts.

7. MONITOR THE CONSEQUENCES.

State and national policymakers should give funding priority to research and evaluation that will help resolve critical questions about the impacts of high school exit exams. More evidence is particularly needed about issues such as the impacts of exit exams on minority students, low-income students, students with disabilities, and English language learners, as well as on high-performing students; the impact of exit exams on student learning and dropout rates; and the relationship between exit exams and postsecondary or workplace outcomes.

In California, the state legislation that authorizes the new high school exit exam also calls for an independent evaluation of the program. This evaluation will report on the quality of the test items, as well as trends in student performance, retention, graduation rates, dropout rates, and college attendance. The study will make recommendations for improving the technical quality of the tests and will inform policymakers about the consequences of the testing program. Two annual evaluation reports have been produced so far, which have influenced the development of the new test. Although it is too soon to tell what the consequences of the tests are for individual students, this issue will be discussed in future reports.

Introduction

People are talking a lot these days about high-stakes testing—tests that are used to make critical decisions affecting students, teachers, or entire schools. For students, the state test with the highest stakes is the mandatory high school exit examination. In most states with these tests, even students who have passed their required courses with decent grades usually will not get a regular diploma unless they also pass exit exams in each of the tested subjects.

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Purpose of the Study

The Center on Education Policy has begun a three-year study of state high school exit exams, with support from the Ford Foundation. Through this project, we hope to help state and national policymakers, media representatives, and others better understand the significance and impact of these tests. This is the first annual report of our findings, which presents baseline data.

To prepare this report, the Center collected current profile information from each state that has or plans to have a mandatory high school graduation exam by 2008. We also reviewed a variety of research studies and analyzed information from state departments of education and other sources. To obtain more detailed information, we conducted case studies of five states — Alaska, Georgia, Indiana, New York, and Ohio — chosen to represent a diversity of size, geographic regions, racial/ethnic makeup, and testing approaches.

In many states, the exams are new or are still in the planning process, and key data are not yet available. Furthermore, state policies are changing rapidly. We have tried our best to include accurate and up-to-date information in this report, but undoubtedly some statistics or policies will have changed soon after publication. As part of our study, we will try to keep abreast of these changes and report updated or expanded information in subsequent reports. We also plan to communicate our findings through a series of meetings.

This report addresses four critical questions:

- Why are so many states adopting high school exit exams?
- What are the impacts of exit exams on students?
- What are exit exams like?
- What major challenges do states face in implementing exit exams?

The report also includes:

- Summaries of our case studies in five states; and
- A data profile of each state that already has, or plans to have, a mandatory high school exit exam by 2008.

Criteria for Including States

This study focuses on mandatory exit exams. These exams merit attention because they are becoming more widespread and will potentially have a greater impact on students' futures than most other tests. Included in our study are states that meet one of the following criteria:

- States that require students to pass state exit exams in order to receive a high school diploma, even if the students have completed the necessary coursework with satisfactory grades.
- States in which the exit exams are a state mandate rather than a local option—in other words, states that require students in all local school districts to pass exit exams, rather than allowing local districts to decide for themselves whether to make the exams a condition of graduation.
- States that are phasing in mandatory high school exit exams. By phasing in, we mean that the state has a legislative charge to have a test in place between 2002 and 2008; has already begun developing the tests; and is trying out the tests with students, although diplomas are not yet being withheld.

This report often refers to an exit exam in the singular, but actually a state exit exam is more like an exam *system*, consisting of multiple tests in different subjects, such as mathematics, English/language arts, science, or social studies.

As an alternative to requiring exit exams as a condition for receiving a diploma, some states use graduation exams to motivate students in different ways, but these states are *not* included in this study. Wisconsin, for example, has a state high school exam, but has left it up to local school districts to determine whether to require students to pass this test before graduating, or even whether to develop their own local graduation test. Some Wisconsin districts do make the test a condition for graduation, while others focus their graduation requirements on grades and course completion. Starting with the class of 2004, Wisconsin districts that do make the test a graduation requirement may begin withholding diplomas from students who have failed.

Nor does this study include states that have differentiated diploma systems instead of mandatory exit exams. Delaware, Connecticut, and Michigan, for example, use state high school exams to award advanced or endorsed diplomas to students who perform well on the tests. In Michigan, students who do well on the state exit exam are eligible for a college scholarship. But students in these states who do not take or pass these tests still receive a regular diploma if they meet other graduation requirements.

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Question 1

Why are so many states adopting exit exams?

HIGHLIGHTS

- States are adopting exit exams primarily to ensure that students graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills needed to do well in a job, college, and other aspects of life. Critics assert, however, that these tests lead to higher dropout rates, place too much weight on a single imperfect measure, and do nothing to ensure that students have an opportunity to learn the material being tested.

- Exit exams are not a new idea. In the 1970's and 1980's, numerous states adopted minimum competency tests to make sure students could read, write, and compute before they graduated. In general, research on these policies suggests that policymakers should be careful about expecting tests to bring about significant improvements in teaching and learning.

- The broader state movement of standards-based reform has revitalized the concept of exit exams and raised expectations beyond basic skills. Standards have given a more solid foundation to exit exams by clarifying what students should know and be able to do by the time they graduate from high school. And standards-based reform has elevated the significance of state tests at all grade levels.

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What Do Supporters of Exit Exams Hope to Accomplish?

By adopting exit exams, state policymakers are trying to ensure that a diploma "means something"—namely, that the holder has attained the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in a job, college, or other aspects of daily life. These policymakers are responding to charges that the value of a high school diploma has depreciated, as academic expectations have gone down and "social promotions" of poorly prepared students to the next grade have gone up.

Clearly, a high school diploma doesn't have the same status as it did forty years ago, when it was a ticket to a good job and a secure future. This is largely because Americans are completing more schooling than they used to. In 1960, only 41% of adults aged 25 and older had completed high school, and only 8% had finished four or more years of college. By 1999, 83% percent of adults had completed high school, and 25% had finished four or more years of college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001a).

But proponents of exit exams are concerned about another type of diploma devaluation. Business leaders, college faculty, and others complain that too many young people graduate from high school without a solid foundation of academic knowledge and skills. A diploma, they contend, often means little more than that a student has put in the requisite amount of seat time. In a 2002 poll by Public Agenda, more than 7 in 10 employers and professors said that the young people they see have just fair or poor skills in grammar, spelling, and writing. And more than 6 in 10 said that young graduates' skills are only fair or poor in basic mathematics.

Many young people themselves agree that high school should be more challenging. In a recent survey of year 2000 graduates of schools designated as "High Schools That Work" by the Southern Regional Education Board, about three-fourths (74%) of the young people agreed they should have worked harder in high school, and two-thirds (66%) said their school should have required them to meet higher academic standards (Bottoms, 2002).

Supporters of exit exams note that fields ranging from air conditioning repair to medicine have long accepted the notion that a person must demonstrate mastery before receiving a credential. Rigorous secondary school tests are an integral part of schooling in many European and East Asian nations, including several that outperform the U.S. on international assessments. Advocates believe that exit exams motivate students and teachers to work harder and focus more attention on important learning goals. Students will learn more and be better prepared for later life.

Advocates are also hoping that exit exams will help to spur a general improvement of public education. Many supporters of these tests believe, accurately or not, that the quality of U.S. public education has declined in recent decades. They view exit exams as a form of quality assurance, especially when they are tied to challenging state standards for what students should know and be able to do. As discussed below, states have already set these standards and have begun holding students and teachers accountable for meeting them.

It is no accident that exit exams are largely a state creation. Unlike many other nations that outscore us on international assessments, the U.S. does not have a national curriculum, a mandatory national test, or powerful central edu-

cation ministry. Most of the authority over what is taught and learned rests with the states and local school districts, rather than with the federal government. So national and state policymakers look to tests as one of the main tools available to them to shape curriculum and instruction in our highly decentralized system.

Proponents of high school exit exams also include some college officials, who hope that these tests will strengthen their applicant pools or provide a new source of information for admissions or placement decisions. In Massachusetts, for example, higher education officials helped to create the state's high school exams, in the hope that state-supported colleges could someday use the results for admissions decisions (Schmidt, 2000). The Board of Trustees of the City University of New York voted to use students' scores on the state Regents Exam in English—instead of CUNY'S own English placement tests—to determine which English courses students will take. Proponents of connecting these exams with admissions and placement decisions note the potential efficiency that can result if students receive consistent messages about what they should be doing in high school to prepare for college and if tests then reflect what they have been told and what they have studied.

What Do the Critics of Exit Exams Say?

Critics of exit exams contend that these tests increase dropout rates by frustrating low-achieving students who initially fail the exam, or who anticipate failing. They point to several research studies (discussed later in this report) to buttress this point. Critics also point out that exit exams can inflict disproportionate harm on minority, poor, and disabled students, who have lower than average passing rates on these tests.

Some opponents also feel high-achieving students can be harmed by exit exams. They contend that the tests may serve as a disincentive for high-achieving students who pass the test and figure they don't have to work as hard in their courses after that. They also are concerned that these tests may decrease the amount of higher-order thinking that is cultivated in classes.

Opponents also point to research showing that when teachers are under pressure to teach to high-stakes tests, they may focus their teaching on test preparation or a narrow subset of knowledge and skills, neglecting other important but more complex topics and skills that don't get tested. Some parents and many teachers feel that pressure from high-stakes test is causing good schools to abandon enriching or engaging learning experiences, such as multidisciplinary projects, field trips, plays, more complex laboratory experiments, and student oral presentations.

An issue of particular concern to the critics is the fairness of hinging a decision as important as high school graduation on the results of a single test. As opponents of these exams are quick to mention, tests are not perfect measures. As testing experts stress, a student's score can be expected to fluctuate due to numerous factors that have nothing to do with learning, such as the test's margin of error, the specific version of a test given, the particular sample of questions asked, the student's health on testing day, and the presence of distractions in the classroom or outside the window. Moreover, state tests can

cover only a small sample of all the important knowledge and skills that students should learn in high school. A three-hour test is bound to leave out some important aspects of learning, including those not easily measured by the test formats in common use today. For these and other reasons, the results of a single test can be misleading.

Finally, critics are quite concerned about whether students are being provided with an adequate opportunity to learn the material being tested, an issue considered later in this report.

Each side in the exit exam debate has a compelling set of arguments and can point to selected studies that support its position. Existing research on the consequences of high-stakes testing—and exit exams in particular—is limited and inconclusive, allowing the controversy to continue based largely on opinion and speculation. The good news is that more studies are in the works, and knowledge is gradually accumulating about the effects of these tests.

What Are the Implications for Students Who Don't Get a High School Diploma?

Although the value of a high school diploma is less clear than it once was, supporters and critics of exit exams agree that the *lack* of a high school diploma is a major obstacle. Failure to obtain a diploma is "the contemporary equivalent of functional illiteracy," as University of Wisconsin researcher Robert Hauser observed (1997, p. 154), and it greatly compromises a young person's opportunities for further education, employment, and social participation.

For example, high school dropouts have lower annual earnings than high school graduates. Among workers aged 25 and older, the earnings gap between dropouts and graduates was $7,080 in 1999. High school graduates without a college degree earned $22,448, on average, compared with $15,368 for high school dropouts (Bureau of the Census, 2002). The job outlook is particularly gloomy for recent dropouts. Among young people who dropped out of high school between October 2000 and October 2001, the unemployment rate was nearly 36%—a full 15 percentage points higher than the unemployment rate for recent high school graduates who were not enrolled in college (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002).

Young people who fail to get a high school diploma also have lower ratings on quality-of-life factors, such as starting and maintaining a family, participating in civic activities, and maintaining good health (Hauser, 1997). Thus, a crucial question for policymakers is whether high school exit exams result in citizens who are more economically productive and lead more fulfilling lives, or in more dropouts who require extensive support from the social service or justice systems, and lead less fulfilling lives.

Have Exit Exams Been Tried Before?

The current push for exit exams is not the first time states have used graduation tests to try to reform public education. During the 1970's and 1980's, an earlier state movement to enact minimum competency tests had similar themes and holds some lessons for today's reformers.

True to their name, minimum competency tests focused primarily on basic skills in reading and math, and were generally targeted toward an 8th or 9th grade level of difficulty or less. These tests were a state response to the concerns of employers, popular writers, and parents that "millions of children were graduating from high school without the competence to go to the grocery store with a shopping list and come back with the right items and the right change" (Lerner, 1991). Supporters of minimum competency tests felt that schools had relaxed their standards and strayed from their academic mission—a problem that could be solved by getting "back to basics."

As with today's exit exams, much of the impetus for minimum competency tests came from state policymakers and grassroots reformers, rather than from teachers or school administrators. Between 1973 and 1983, the number of states with some form of statewide minimum competency testing rose from 2 to 34, although not all of these tests were required for graduation (Linn, 2000). During the 1990's, many states phased out their minimum competency tests or refashioned them into standards-based exams that were aligned with more rigorous standards for student learning.

As discussed under Question 2 of this report, studies of the first wave of minimum competency tests disagree about its impacts. Some analysts found positive effects, in terms of test score gains and reductions in the black-white achievement gap during the period when the tests were in vogue. Other researchers were skeptical that minimum competency exams were the cause of a rise in test scores that began before the exams were in full swing and occurred even in states without such exams. While supportive studies applauded minimum competency tests for sending a message to students that they needed to work harder and acquire certain basic skills, critical studies condemned them for increasing dropout rates and disproportionately harming minority and low-income students (U.S. Office of Technology Assessment, 1992). Other analysts faulted the exams for aiming too low, possibly encouraging teachers to focus too much on basic skills and students to choose the path of least resistance through high school (Dee, 2002).

Finally, studies have concluded that minimum competency tests did not bring about the significant gains in student learning or broad improvements in public education that reformers had hoped for (U.S. Office of Technology Assessment, 1992). A lesson from the minimum competency experience may be that present-day policymakers should be cautious about expecting tests to carry so much of the water of education reform.

How Do Exit Exams Fit into Standards-Based Reform?

The current push for exit exams is part of a broader movement called standards-based reform, which began in the early 1990's. Like minimum competency testing, standards-based reform was largely a state effort, although it received boosts from various federal actions and legislation.

Standards-based reform aims to improve the quality of public education by setting challenging state standards for what students should know and be able to do in core academic subjects at various grade levels. Tests play a key role in standards-based reform, because they are used to measure students' progress toward standards and create a basis for holding educators accountable for rais-

ing student achievement. For example, most state accountability systems use yearly averages of student test scores to identify low-performing schools and target them for interventions. In 2002, 49 states had set standards in at least three core subjects, and 37 states were administering standards-based assessments at least once during the elementary, middle and high school years (*Education Week* and Pew Charitable Trusts, 2002).

By raising expectations for student learning beyond basic skills to more demanding levels, standards-based reform has sought to quiet some critics of minimum competency testing. Current trends in exit exams reflect this philosophical shift. As of Spring 2002, 10 states had minimum competency exams (MCEs), defined in this report as exit exams that focus on basic skills below the high school level, and 7 states had standards-based exams (SBEs), defined as exit exams that are aligned with state standards at the high school level. Two states used end-of-course exams (EOCs) as a graduation requirement. These exams seek to assess what students learned in a high school course and can be even more challenging than SBEs.

As explained in more detail under Question 3, the balance is shifting toward more difficult tests. By 2008, the number of states with SBEs will far outstrip the number with MCEs, and EOCs will edge ahead of MCEs.

Box B illustrates the differences in the goals and difficulty levels of these three types of exams by using a sample of states' own descriptions of what they are trying to accomplish with an MCE, an SBE, and an EOC.

BOX B: HOW STATES DESCRIBE THREE DIFFERENT TYPES OF EXIT EXAMS

The descriptions used by state departments of education to inform people about their exit exams provide insights about the goals of various types of tests and the politics of designing tests that are challenging yet realistic.

Goals of a Minimum Competency Exam

Minnesota's *Basic Skills Tests* assess "the essential competencies for employment, further education and functioning in society." To pass the math test, "students must be able to solve problems involving numbers, shapes and symbols commonly used in adult life. The test covers material introduced to students before the 6th grade." To pass the writing test, "students must write a clear message in English for an adult reader." (Minnesota State Department of Education website)

Goals of a Standards-based Exam

"Today, basic skills aren't enough to guarantee our children will find good jobs and become productive citizens," states the Alabama Department of Education in its description of the *Alabama High School Graduation Exams*. These tests are intended to measure knowledge and skills that are "not basic or advanced, but fundamental," generally at the 11th grade level. "Our graduation exam is one that meets real world challenges," the state materials assert. "Equally important, it is an exam that our students are capable of passing." (Alabama Department of Education website)

Goals of an End-of-course Exit Exam

The *Maryland High School Assessments (HSA)* are end-of-course tests in English I, government, algebra/data analysis, geometry, and biology. "These challenging tests are necessary to raise standards for high school students and to enhance the value of the Maryland high school diploma," say the state descriptions of these tests. The tests will replace the Maryland Functional Tests, developed in the 1980's "to measure only the most basic skills and functional knowledge . . . The HSA will better prepare students for the variety of challenges they will encounter in life and in their careers." (Maryland State Department of Education website)

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Standards have also supplied a more defensible basis for exit exams by defining the content that students should learn by the end of high school. In the 1980's, states had not yet developed academic content standards, so standards were merely implied by the content of the prior forms of minimum competency tests.

How Will the No Child Left Behind Act Affect Exit Exams?

State testing policies are being influenced greatly by a new federal law, the No Child Left Behind Act signed by President George W. Bush in 2002. Under the new law, states must test all students annually in grades 3 through 8 in reading and math, and must test students at least once between grades 10 and 12. In other words, all states must have a high school test, although it need not be a high stakes exit exam tied to graduation. As of January 2002, only 16 states administered tests in all the required grades (*Education Week* and Pew Charitable Trusts, 2002). So it seems clear that the new law will increase the amount of state testing, as states change their policies to conform to the federal law.

The law will also increase the consequences attached to test scores. Under this legislation, schools and school districts must demonstrate that their students are making "adequate yearly progress," as gauged by average test scores and other measures. Schools and districts that fail to show achievement gains among all major racial, ethnic, and income groups will be subject to various district and state interventions. But decisions about whether to attach consequences to test scores for individual students are not federally mandated. So states will continue to have the flexibility to decide whether students must pass an exit exam before graduating.

Certain provisions of this new federal law might actually make states more cautious about adopting exit exams or about setting high pass scores. The law requires school districts to demonstrate they are making adequate yearly progress toward the state's student achievement goals. Graduation rates are one of the indicators that states must use to determine whether districts are making adequate progress. This requirement could serve as a disincentive for states to introduce a new exit exam, if they fear that such a test could bring down graduation rates and target more school districts for interventions. In addition, states will have to use more of their own resources to expand their testing programs, upgrade their teaching force, and meet other requirements of the new law. This could mean fewer resources to implement state exit exams.

Question 2

What are the impacts of exit exams on students?

HIGHLIGHTS

- Exit exams are having a major impact on U.S. students, especially minority students. In 2002, almost half of all public school students, and more than half of all minority students, live in the 18 states that require students to pass a test before graduating. If states follow through with their current plans, within six years, at least 24 states will have exit exam requirements affecting 7 in 10 students and 8 in 10 minority students.

- States with exit exams tend to have higher levels of poverty and lower per pupil spending than the national average.

- States are acting somewhat on faith as they move ahead with exit exams. Studies offer mixed evidence about whether graduation exams improve student learning, but they do offer some evidence to justify concerns that these tests are connected with higher dropout rates.

- In states with exit exams that report passing rates, the percentages of students who don't pass on the first try range from 9% to 69% in mathematics, depending on the state, and from 5% to 53% in English/language arts. African American and Hispanic students are much less likely to pass on the first attempt than white and Asian students. Passing rates are also lower for poor students, students with disabilities, and English language learners.

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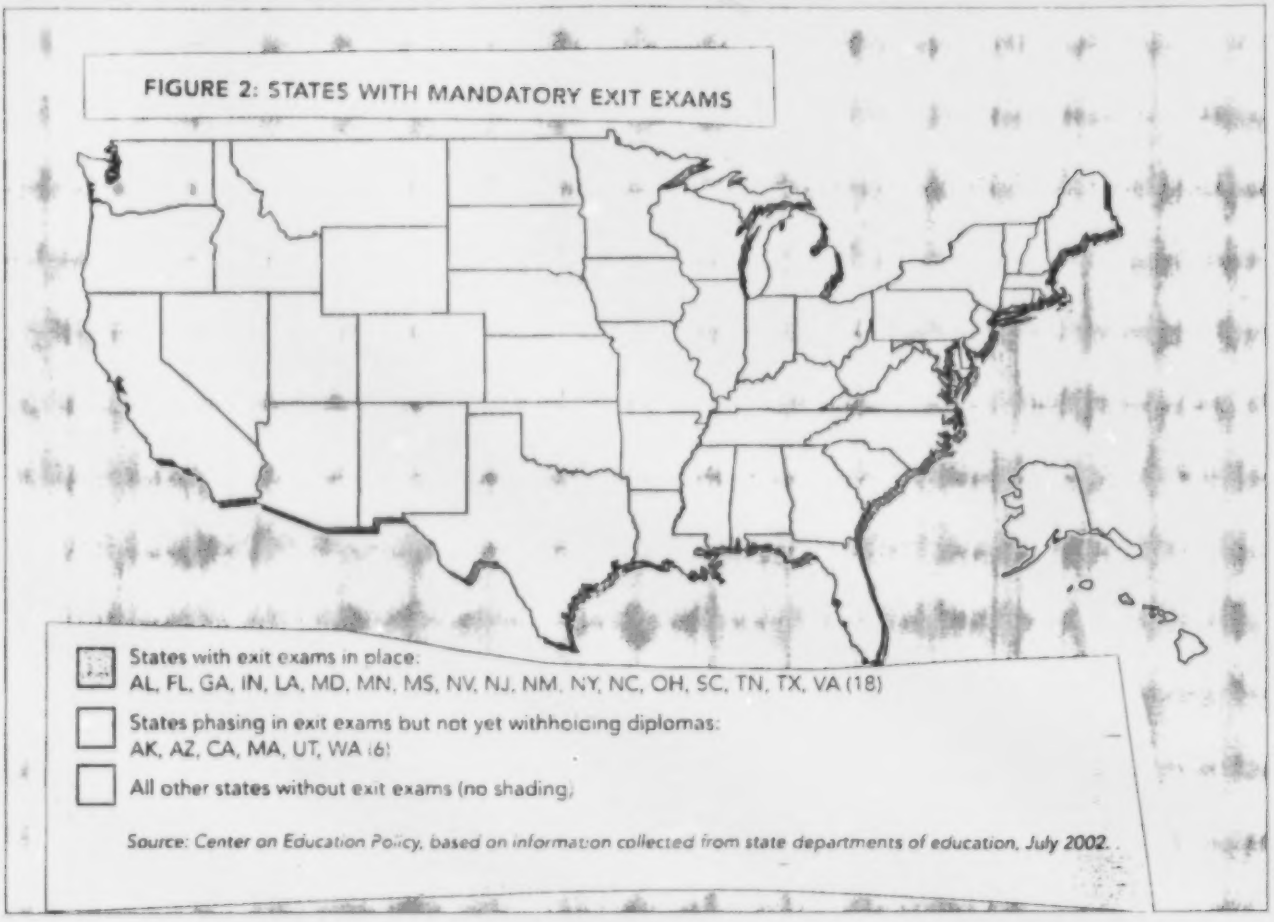
FIGURE 2: STATES WITH MANDATORY EXIT EXAMS
States with exit exams in place:
AL, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, VA (18)
States phasing in exit exams but not yet withholding diplomas:
AK, AZ, CA, MA, UT, WA (6)
All other states without exit exams (no shading)
Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2002.

How Widespread Are Exit Exams?

Exit exams are already a powerful force in public education, and within a few years, their impact will be felt even more strongly as more states require them for graduation. According to our survey data, 18 states required high school seniors in the class of 2002 to pass a state exit exam before receiving a regular high school diploma. Six other states have begun to phase in exit exams, but have not yet started to withhold diplomas based on the new tests. This means that by 2008, at least 24 states will have exit exam requirements in place.

The states with exit exams include several large or fast growing states, as well as states with higher than average minority populations. By comparing the Center's exit exam data with U.S. Department of Education enrollment data, we have concluded that almost half (49%) of all public school students and more than half (54%) of all minority public school students currently live in states with exit exam requirements (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002b). By 2008, exit exams will affect roughly 7 in 10 public school students and 8 in 10 minority students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001b).

Which Types of States Have Exit Exams?

A study of high school exit exams by researchers Audrey Amrein and David Berliner (2002) observed that these tests are more common in states that:

- Are located in the South and Southwest (the Western states will have the greatest increase in the number of states with exit exams over the next decade);

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- Have higher percentages of African American and Hispanic students and lower percentages of white students than the national average;
- Have the greatest degrees of poverty;
- Allocate less school funding per pupil than the national average;
- Have more centralized state governments, rather than powerful local governments; and
- Have high population growth compared to the nation.

Amrein and Berliner noted an interesting common thread among many of the states with high school exit exams; namely, that they "have lower levels of achievement, and the always present correlate of low achievement, poorer students." Policymakers in these states may have pursued standards-based reforms and high-stakes testing more aggressively because of public concerns about low performance and failing schools.

As Amrein and Berliner have stressed, however, the data are variable. For instance, not every state with a high percentage of minority students has adopted exit exams. But the researchers calculated that 75% of the states with an African American population above the national average have exit exams, and by 2008, 81% of such states will. Of the states with a Hispanic population above the national average, 67% have exit exams, and by 2008, 89% will have them. Only 13% of the states with an above-average percentage of white students have implemented exit exams.

These demographic findings are important, because they mean that any negative consequences of exit exams will have a disproportionate effect on poor and minority students.

What Does the Research Say About Impacts on Students?

One reason why there is so much debate about whether high school exit exams are a good or bad idea is because research on their effects is limited, and the findings are mixed and often contradictory. States are operating in somewhat of a vacuum as they implement these tests, but the knowledge base is gradually increasing as researchers pay more attention to these issues.

Understanding how any educational policy affects the lives of students is a complex task for several reasons. Educational outcomes, such as student achievement or dropout rates, are influenced by numerous factors that interact with one another, including the quality of instruction, school resources, students' individual personalities, and their home and community environments. Even sophisticated research designs that attempt to control for these factors have difficulty isolating the effects of a particular testing policy.

Also, researchers come to the issue of high-stakes testing with personal values and opinions that can influence how they design their studies and interpret the results. In addition, some student outcomes, such as dropout rates, are not consistently defined or calculated across states or studies, which makes it difficult to compare the findings of different studies. How to calculate dropout rates is an especially thorny problem, because of disagreement about such questions as which age ranges and grades to consider, what time of the school year to

count student enrollments, how long of an absence from school should be counted as dropping out, or how to track the many students who move into or out of a school district (National Research Council, 2001a).

Furthermore, much of the research on student impacts has been drawn from past experience with minimum competency tests. Many states are introducing new, more rigorous standards-based exams. These newer exams may not have been in place long enough to gauge their effects on students, and it remains to be seen whether findings from prior research will still apply. To answer key questions, researchers will have to monitor at least a few cohorts of students from the time they first take the tests until the time they graduate and for a few years after leaving school.

Research on the impacts of exit exams on students has mostly focused on three areas described below: student achievement, dropout rates, and opportunities after high school.

IMPACT ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT Evidence is mixed about whether exit exams help increase student learning. Usually when a new mandatory graduation test is introduced, student performance on that test increases for the first few years (Linn, 2000). The key question, however, is whether gains on a high-stakes exit exam are corroborated by other indicators of student learning. If adopting a high-stakes test really leads students to study harder or teachers to teach better, then scores should also rise on other measures of achievement in the same subject area. If they don't, one can speculate that teachers may be teaching too narrowly to the state test—that is, "training" students to perform well on the state test rather than teaching them in a way that helps them learn the broader curriculum.

The majority of studies have found no evidence that exit exams increase student learning, as measured by other indicators (e.g., Jacob, 2001; Neill and Gayler, 1999). Amrein and Berliner (2002) conducted a "time-series analysis" for the 18 states that use tests for graduation and other high-stakes purposes. The researchers looked at changes in student performance on four different standardized tests—the SAT, ACT, Advanced Placement (AP) exams, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—focusing on whether average scores on these other measures rose or fell in the years after the state began using exams for high-stakes purposes. Although some states showed increased scores on their own high-stakes tests over time, these gains typically did not transfer to the other measures. For instance, after implementing exit exams, 12 of the 18 states analyzed showed overall decreases in ACT performance, and 10 showed decreases in SAT scores. After controlling for student participation rates, states with exit exams also showed decreases in the percentage of students passing AP tests. Only on the NAEP reading test did these states demonstrate gains.

John Bishop has compiled a body of evidence suggesting that high school exit exams do have positive effects on student learning (2001). In one analysis of international data, he found that 7th and 8th grade students in countries with exit exams performed significantly better on the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS). To control for the influence of national culture, Bishop used similar data to examine the achievement of 13-year-olds in

Canada in the early 1990's and found that students in provinces with exit exams scored significantly higher in math and science than students in other provinces. In a separate analysis, Bishop found that students in New York during the 1990's scored higher on the SAT and NAEP than students in other states. At that time, New York had a system of Regents Exams resembling the end-of-course exams taken by secondary school students in other countries.

These findings may not be as contradictory as they appear at first glance. Bishop's international research has focused on exit exams in other countries that tend to be tied to specific courses, assess more difficult material, and report multiple levels of achievement in the subject area. In contrast, most other studies conducted in this country have focused on the pass-fail type of minimum competency tests used in the U.S. in the past. The impact of exit exams on student achievement may depend on the nature and difficulty of the specific tests. It will be important to monitor whether the recent shift among states toward standards-based exams has a more positive impact on student learning than past exams have shown.

IMPACT ON DROPOUT RATES The relationship between exit exams and dropout rates has been studied more extensively. Many but not all studies suggest that exit exams are associated with increased dropout rates, though the causal connections are unclear.

One 1989 study found that the states with the highest dropout rates had minimum competency exit exams, while none of the states with the lowest dropout rates used state tests for graduation or other high-stakes purposes (Kreitzer, Madaus, and Haney, 1989). This does not mean that the exit exams actually caused more students to drop out; perhaps low student performance spurred certain states to adopt exit exams in the first place. Some limited evidence of a causal connection between exit exams and rising dropout rates comes from a 1989 study by James Catterall that included interviews with more than 700 students from four states with exit exams. Catterall found that students who initially failed the exams were much more likely to express doubts about their chances of finishing school, even after the researcher controlled for factors like academic performance, retention in the earlier grades, peer cultures, and family background.

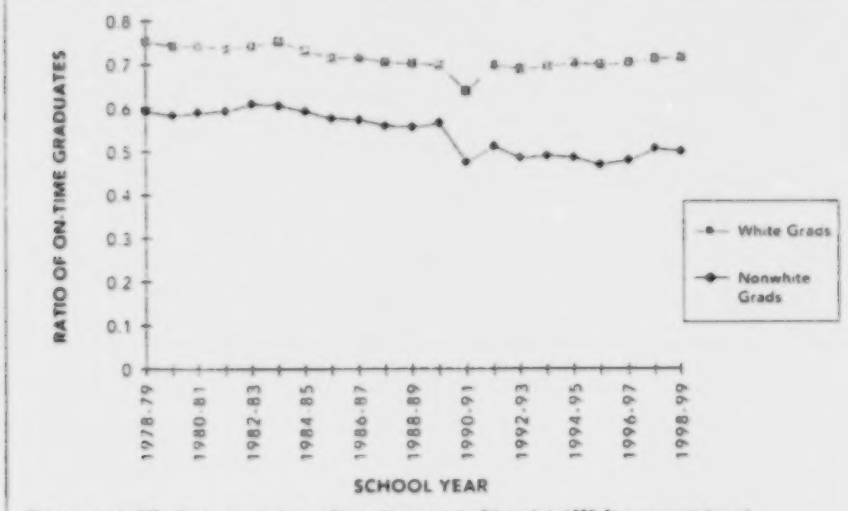
Some studies support the critics' charges that exit exams have a more negative impact on the lowest achieving students. Jacob (2001) found that low-achieving students in states with exit exams were about 25% more likely to drop out of high school than comparable peers in states without exit exams; no such effect was found for higher achieving students.

Other research has linked failure on exit exams with increased dropout rates among higher-achieving students. Based on data from more than 76,000 Florida students, Griffin and Heidorn (1996) concluded that students who failed the state graduation test were much more likely to drop out of school than other students—but only if the failing students had a relatively high grade point average. Students with lower GPA's did not seem to be affected by failing the test. The researchers speculated that the perceived stigma attached to failing the test might cause students with good academic records to experience an acute drop in self-esteem or sense of embarrassment.

BOX C: DROPOUT RATES IN TEXAS

Texas has had a statewide high school graduation test since 1986—first a minimum competency test called the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS), then a more rigorous standards-based measure called the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). Walt Haney (2001) looked at school completion rates—basically the opposite of dropout rates—over a 20-year period. He calculated these rates by dividing the number of high school graduates in a given year by the number of 9th graders three years earlier. The resulting ratio, shown in Figure 3, represents the proportion of 9th graders who progressed through high school on time, to graduate three and a half years later.

FIGURE 3 Proportion of 9th Graders in Texas Who Complete High School on Time



The chart reads: 59% of non-white students in Texas who were in the 9th grade in 1975–76 progressed through high school on time and graduated 3 and a half years later in 1979.

Source: Adapted from Haney (2001, p. 11), used with permission of author.

As Figure 3 illustrates, the ratio of on-time graduates fell only slightly between school years 1978-79 and 1990-91. But in 1991-92, the first year after implementation of the new, more difficult TAAS exam, the ratio showed the steepest drop of the entire 20-year period. Particularly troubling is the more severe decline for minority students. Although completion rates rose in 1992-93 for both white and non-white students, the ratio of on-time graduates among minority students never again reached the higher levels of the pre-1991 era.

Using a different method to calculate high school completion rates, Jerald (2001) reached a rosier conclusion about dropout rates in Texas. Jerald compared the number of high school graduates earning a regular diploma against the number of 8th graders (instead of 9th graders) four years earlier. He found that completion rates have been steadily improving since 1993, a period during which the TAAS and related accountability systems were fully in place. Furthermore, the rate of improvement in Texas exceeded the national trend for the same period. Jerald also reports that Just for the Kids, an independent Texas-based organization, conducted similar analyses for various groups of Texas students. According to their data, completion rates went up for all student groups between 1993 to 1999, with white and Hispanic students improving by 5 percentage points and African American students improving by 7 seven percentage points.

Although these studies are just one aspect of the larger debate about the impact of high-stakes testing in Texas, they illustrate the complexity of measuring dropout rates and the need for a more consistent and generally accepted method.

Other evidence suggests that exit exams do not increase dropout rates. Lillard and DeCicca (2001) compared dropout rates across states and over time when states introduced new graduation requirements. They found that introducing these exams had no significant effect on dropout rates, but that increasing coursework requirements for graduation had a big effect. Since the two policies tend to go hand in hand, it is important for studies of the impact of exit exams on dropout rates to control for course requirements.

As described in Box C, Dropout Rates in Texas, the difficulty of an exit exam may also be a factor in its relationship with dropout rates.

Several other factors beside exit exams have been shown to be associated with dropping out of school (National Research Council, 2001a). Students who have been retained in grade or who have frequent absences, poor grades, and low test scores are more prone to drop out later on. Hispanic students are the most likely to drop out, followed by African American students, and then white students. Students from poor, single-parent, or large families, or who are parents themselves, are at higher risk of dropping out. These findings suggest the need for states and school districts to identify students early who are at risk of dropping out and provide them with ongoing support, counseling, and academic interventions—long before they must take a high school exit exam.

IMPACT ON OPPORTUNITIES AFTER HIGH SCHOOL Do exit exams help improve students chances of attending college? Do they help prepare students to get good jobs? To explore these questions, Bishop and Mane (1998) analyzed information from two data sets that followed students for several years after high school. Their study controlled for other relevant factors, such as grade point averages, courses taken and family background. They found that students who were required to take exit exams were significantly more likely to be in college during the four-year period after high school graduation than those who didn't have to take these tests. This effect was somewhat more pronounced for minority students. In addition, graduates of high schools with exit exams obtained jobs that paid much better than those held by other students, and this pay advantage continued for the next five years. This effect was larger for graduates in 1992 than 1980. These findings are intriguing and warrant further exploration.

Less is known about whether the *scores* that students earn on exit exams can help to predict their future success in college and jobs and whether they could be useful in making decisions about applicants. The Business Roundtable, an organization that has supported standards-based reform, encourages businesses to ask students for test score results when hiring entry-level employees. But studies indicate that K-12 test scores are only mildly predictive of worker productivity, so researchers warn they are not a good basis for selecting employees (Levin, 1999). This is not surprising given that current high school tests are not designed for this purpose nor are they designed specifically with college success in mind. Studies now underway could elucidate what it might take to better align tests with higher education and workforce standards.

NEW RESEARCH ON EXIT EXAMS The debate is far from settled about whether exit exams, on balance, lead to positive or negative consequences for students. Fortunately, policymakers and researchers are showing increased interest in monitoring the consequences of high-stakes testing. Several major studies are underway that promise to shed further light on the subject. (See Table 1—Studies to Watch For.)

TABLE 1 Studies to Watch For (Order is based on planned completion dates)

STUDY	GOALS	TIMELINE & WORK PLAN
The Unintended Consequences of High-stakes Testing By Audrey Amrein and David Berliner Education Policy Reports Project www.edpolicyreports.org	Examine the negative side effects of high-stakes testing.	*Report to be released by Fall 2002* Researchers are using a time-series analysis to look at impacts of high-stakes testing policies on dropout rates, enrollment in GED programs, special education and English language learners, and instruction.
Intended and Unintended Consequences Project Conducted by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) Sponsored by the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education www.education.umn.edu/nceo/projects/proj.default.html	Evaluate the intended and unintended consequences of large-scale assessments and accountability systems for students with disabilities.	*2000-2003* A series of reports will examine the impacts of accountability systems within five domains: (1) standards and IEPs; (2) achievement trends; (3) assessment and social promotion policies; (4) graduation policies and diploma options; and (5) system effects. The study is looking at longitudinal data from a few states with mature accountability systems, and comparing the results to states with emerging accountability systems.
Standards for Success Located at the University of Oregon and Stanford University Sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Association of American Universities (AAU) www.s4s.org	Identify the key knowledge and skills that entering students need for university success, so that university admissions and state K-12 standards and assessments can be better aligned.	*2000-2003* Part 1: National conversations have been held at nine AAU institutions to produce a comprehensive statement of skills needed to succeed in entry-level university courses. Part 2: Researchers are analyzing state standards and assessments to determine the match between the tests and the types and depth of knowledge required for higher education success. Findings will be made available online to university admission officers, who may choose to use the state-based information when making student admissions or course placement decisions.
The American Diploma Project Conducted by ACHIEVE, The Education Trust, the Fordham Foundation, and the National Alliance of Business	Align high school exit expectations with those of higher education and employers. Then develop and solidify demand for standards-based high school assessment data in the admissions and hiring processes.	*2001-2003* Year 1: Study partners are examining the gaps between existing high school exams and college-admissions tests and workplace expectations in 5 states (IN, KY, MA, NV, TX). Based on findings, panels in each state are determining whether they need to refine their existing state standards and high school tests, and are making plans to use them in admissions and hiring.

STUDY	GOALS	TIMELINE & WORK PLAN
(continued) **The American Diploma Project** Sponsored by the Hewlett Foundation www.achieve.org/achieve.nsf/DiplomaProject?OpenForm		*(continued)* Year 2: Representatives from partner states will develop common benchmarks that high school graduates should meet in reading, writing and math. Project will encourage other states to also use the benchmarks.
Evaluation of the California High School Exit Exam Conducted by HumRRO Sponsored by the California State Department of Education www.cde.ca.gov/statetests/cahsee/independenteval.html	Provide an independent evaluation of California's new high school exam (CAHSEE) in terms of: **Quality**: Does the exam provide an accurate and unbiased measure of the knowledge and skills specified in the state content standards? **Fairness**: Do all students have adequate notice of the new requirement, an opportunity to learn the material covered by the exam, and an opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned? **Consequences**: Do benefits from the exam, in terms of improved student achievement and other positive consequences, outweigh any negative consequences?	*2000-2004* Researchers are analyzing data from field tests, annual test administrations, and surveys of teachers and students to determine trends in student performance and effects of the exam on retention, graduation, dropout rates, and college attendance rates. The study will report on differential effects for English language learners, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students. Yearly reports will make recommendations for improving the quality, fairness, validity, and reliability of the exam. (Reports for the first two years are already available on the CAHSEE website.)
Educational Policy Reform Research Institute Collaboration among the Institute for Exceptional Children and Youth, National Center on Educational Outcomes, and Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative Located at the University of Maryland Sponsored by Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education www.eprri.org/about.html	Explore impacts that educational accountability reforms are having on students with disabilities at the system and individual student levels.	*Timeline undetermined.* Researchers are conducting intensive field studies in eight local school districts within four states (NY, MD, CA, and TX). They will report in depth about how accountability policies are being implemented and perceived and how they are affecting students with disabilities.

Source: Compiled by Center on Education Policy, July 2002.

How Many Students Are Likely to Fail Exit Exams?

When state policymakers adopt high school exit exams, their goal is not to increase the dropout rates. Instead, they anticipate that students who make an effort will be able to meet state standards, pass the tests, and receive a diploma. Policymakers must acknowledge, however, that more rigorous exit exams could reduce the prospects for graduating with a regular diploma for some young people.

A key question, therefore, is how many students fail state exit exams. The answer is not as clear-cut as might be expected. States collect and report different types of data on passing rates. Some states report data broken down by race, ethnicity, income, and other student characteristics, while other states don't report passing rate data at all. Many states report data on the percentages of students who pass the exams on the first try, but far fewer track students over time so that they can report data on cumulative passing rates after multiple tries. For this reason, it is difficult to get an accurate figure of the number of students who are ultimately denied a diploma because they didn't pass the test after multiple attempts.

Passing rates are affected by variations among states in the difficulty, characteristics, and implementation year of their exit exams, so it is unwise to draw too many conclusions from comparisons in passing rates among states. For example, passing rates are very responsive to the stakes attached to a test. If an exit exam doesn't yet count for graduation, some students will make little effort to do well. But when the stakes rise, students perceive that an exam "counts"; they try harder, and scores often go up.

TABLE 2 Percentages of Students Passing State Exit Exams on the First Attempt

States	ENGLISH			MATH	SCIENCE	SOCIAL STUDIES
	Reading	ELA	Writing			
Alabama	88%	86%		83%	82%	
Alaska	66%		47%	44%		
Arizona	67%		68%	31%		
California		64%		44%		
Florida	58%			72%		
Georgia		94%	92%	91%	68%	80%
Indiana		68%		65%		
Louisiana		78%		65%		
Massachusetts	82%			75%		
Minnesota		80%	91%	75%		
New Mexico	92%	82%	95%	82%	80%	79%
South Carolina	85%		86%	81%		
Tennessee				76%	95%	
Virginia	82%	82%	84%			

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2002.
Note: The exit exams in these states are quite different from each other in their characteristics, difficulty, and year of implementation, which may help to account for the different passing rates among the states.

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The newness of an exam also affects student performance. During the first year an exam is administered, students and teachers are unfamiliar with its format, content, and expectations, regardless of whether it counts for graduation, and teachers would have had fewer opportunities for professional development related to the test. But during the next few years, scores tend to rise, as students become more familiar with the test and teachers start aligning their instruction with its demands. Eventually, scores tend to level off (Linn, 2002). This trend raises doubts about the practicality of state accountability systems that demand a continuously rising line of test score gains over an extended period of time. Once a test has become well established, policymakers may be unrealistic to expect steady improvements each year.

PASSING RATES ON THE FIRST TRY The Center on Education Policy has collected recent information about the percentages of students who pass exit exams on the first try from states that make these statistics available. Table 2 displays the results. Most of these data are from test administrations in 2001, except for Florida and Minnesota, which are from 2002, and New Mexico, which was from school year 2000-01.

We found that passing rates vary considerably, but in several states, significant percentages of students are not passing state exit exams on the first try. In math, the average passing rate ranged from 31% in Arizona to 91% in Georgia. In other words, about 69% of Arizona students failed the math exam on the first try, as did 9% of Georgia students. Alaska and California had passing rates of 44% in math on students' first attempt; in other words, more than half (56%) of the students in these two states failed the test on the first try. California, however, was administering its exit exam for the first time in 2001; in addition, the new exit exam was given to 9th graders on a voluntary basis rather than 10th graders for whom the test is now mandatory. One must remember, too, that in all the states, students will have multiple opportunities to retake the tests—hopefully after receiving remediation.

In general, passing rates are somewhat higher in English/language arts than in math. In the various subtests that make up the English/language arts exams in different states, the percentage of students passing on the first try ranged from 47% on Alaska's writing test, to 95% on New Mexico's writing test. In other words, about 53% of Alaska students and 5% of New Mexico students failed that exit exam on the first attempt.

The policy in all states is to require a student to pass all subject tests before receiving a regular diploma. The number of tests given is important. This form of testing, called "conjunctive" by assessment experts, can rapidly reduce the percentage of students graduating since the pool is immediately limited to the percentage who pass the test with the lowest pass rate. In other words, if 65% pass the math test, no more than 65% can ever graduate no matter how many pass other tests.

To better understand some of the more detailed trends related to passing rates, the Center took a closer look at disaggregated data from the 2001-02 test administrations in a sample of three states: Indiana, Massachusetts, and Minnesota. (See Table 3—Percentages of Students Passing on First Try by Subgroups for Three States.)

TABLE 3
Percentages of Students Passing on the First Attempt by Subgroups for Three States[1]

Student Groups	Indiana Math	Indiana English/LA	Minnesota Math	Minnesota[2] English/LA	Massachusetts Math	Massachusetts English/LA
All students	65%	68%	75%	80%	75%	82%
Asian	79%	72%	62%	61%	84%	79%
Black	31%	38%	33%	46%	46%	59%
Hispanic	46%	49%	43%	52%	41%	51%
White	70%	73%	80%	86%	82%	87%
Free/ reduced lunch	42%	45%	51%	59%	Not available	Not available
Students with Disablilities	24%	19%	33%	40%	39%	46%
English language learners	33%	28%	32%	30%	42%	39%

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2002).

Note 1: The exit exams in these states are quite different from each other in their characteristics, difficulty, and year of implementation, which may help to account for the different passing rates among the states.
Note 2: Minnesota data are from Spring 2002. The other state data are from 2001.

As displayed in Table 3, wide gaps exist in passing rates between white and Asian students on one hand, and black and Hispanic students on the other. If a failure to pass an exit exam on the first try does lead to higher dropout rates, then black and Hispanic students will be much more negatively affected.

In Indiana, for example, Asian and white students were more than twice as likely as black students, and more than one and a half times as likely as Hispanic students, to pass the math test on the first try. Less than a third of black students (31%) and less than half of Hispanic students (46%) passed the Indiana math exam on the first try, compared with 70% of white students and 79% of Asian students. The racial-ethnic gaps were somewhat lower for Indiana's English/language arts exam, but still alarming.

On the Massachusetts math exit exam, Asian and white students were about twice as likely as Hispanic students, and about one and three-quarters times as likely as black students, to pass on the first try.

As the data illustrate, other subgroups of students also have passing rates on exit exams that are well below the rate for the total population. In all three of these states, low-income students (those eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches) were far less likely to pass either the English/language arts or the math exams. In Minnesota, for example, the passing rates of low-income students were 24 percentage points lower in math and 21 percentage points lower in English/language arts than the state average. And in all three states, the lowest passing rates of any subgroups were for students with disabilities and

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limited English proficient students. The complex issue of how to assess these two subgroups of students accurately and fairly is discussed in more depth under Question 4 of this report.

CUMULATIVE PASSING RATES What really matters is whether a student who fails an exit exam on the first try ultimately passes on a later attempt and receives a diploma. Although most states do not report data on cumulative passing rates, the information that is available suggests that the great majority of students do eventually pass after multiple tries.

The Center obtained data on cumulative passing rates from a few states. Among the states that did report this data, the cumulative passing rates were very high. For example, Indiana reports that 98.5% of the students in the class of 2000 who completed all the required coursework also passed the exit exams and received a diploma. Ohio reports that 98% of the class of 2002 passed the exit exams by the time they were ready to graduate. It is unclear, however, whether these rates are typical or which students are included or excluded. Perhaps states only report these data if they are very positive.

It would be premature to conclude that because of these high cumulative passing rates, only a very small proportion of students are being prevented from earning a diploma. State-reported data on cumulative passing rates can be misleading, because the counts of student on which they are based often do not include high school students who drop out, repeat their senior year, move away, or are excluded from testing because of disability or language status.

The most extensive statistics on the percentage of students who are denied regular diplomas because they failed to meet the state exit exam requirements can be found in Amrein and Berliner (2002). Among states that reported data, these researchers found that this percentage ranged from 2% in Minnesota, Ohio, and Texas to 10% in New York, with most states reporting ultimate failure rates under 5%. For states that didn't collect these data, Amrein and Berliner estimated ultimate failure rates; their estimates ranged from a low of 0.5% in Virginia to a high of 12% in Georgia. They also note that their data do not include students who dropped out or were exempted from testing.

More research is clearly needed to determine exactly how many students are not earning diplomas because of exit exams. To collect this information, analysts would have to track the performance of individual students on various subject tests and retests, to determine which ones have passed all subject tests by the time they are ready to graduate. Usually this kind of tracking is done at the school or district level, not at the state level.

Question 3

What are these exams like?

HIGHLIGHTS

- States are attempting to make their exit exams tougher and better aligned with state standards. If current policies remain the same, by 2008, only 3 of the 24 states with mandatory graduation tests will have minimum competency exams, while 16 will have standards-based exams and 5 will have end-of-course exams.
- All states provide students who don't pass the test on the first try with multiple opportunities for retesting.
- The new generation of exit exams covers a broader range of subjects and uses more open-ended questions than earlier tests. Most state exit exams ask students to write some form of short essay.

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How Rigorous Is the Content of Exit Exams?

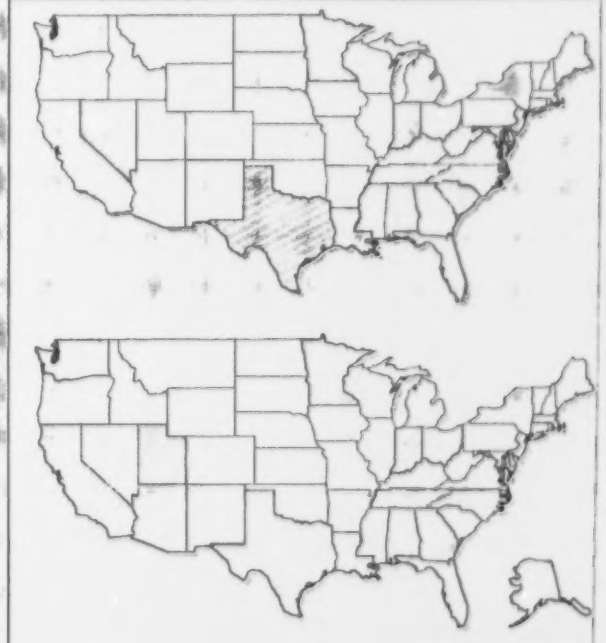
State exit exams are far from uniform. Each state's exam system is the product of a unique set of decisions about the difficulty, format, content and timing of the tests. To learn more about the features of the 24 exam systems that are currently in place or being phased in, the Center on Education Policy collected information from state departments of education, research studies, and surveys.

Using states' own descriptions of their exit exams, the Center has placed state tests into three general categories: minimum competency exams (MCEs), standards–based exams (SBEs), and end-of-course exams (EOCs). Although not every state exam fits neatly into one of these categories, these distinctions can shed light on how exit exams are changing.

Minimum competency exams, the first category, present a challenge for a small proportion of low-achieving students, but are generally not an obstacle for most high school students.

Standards-based exams, the second category, are intended to be more rigorous than MCEs. But policymakers must walk a fine line between promoting these exams as challenging, while reassuring students, parents, educators and the public that the goals are realistic and offer a fair basis for awarding high school diplomas. Both MCEs and SBEs are generally administered during a special time set aside for testing, usually in the spring and sometimes lasting a whole week. Often students take one or more exams in a specific subject each day, with each exam taking a few hours.

FIGURE 4 Number of States Requiring Students to Pass Minimum Competency, Standards-based, or End-of-course Exams to Graduate in 2002 and by 2008



IN 2002 (out of 18 states)

MCE: FL, MD, MN, MS, NC, OH, NV, SC, TN, VA (10)

SBE: AL, GA, IN, LA, NJ, NM, TX (7)

EOC: NY, TX (2)

Note: Total for 2002 adds up to 19 because Texas currently gives students the option to pass either an SBE or EOCs.

MCE – minimum competency exam (focused on basic skills, below high school level)

SBE – standards-based exam (aligned with state standards, high school level)

EOC – end-of-course exam (tied to a specific course, high school level)

BY 2008 (out of 24 states)

MCE: AK, MN, UT (3)

SBE: AL, AZ, CA, FL, IN, LA, MA, NV, NJ, NM, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, WA (16)

EOC: GA, MD, MS, NY, VA (5)

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2002.

End-of-course exams, the third category, are given to individuals when they complete a specific high school course, in order to assess what they learned in that course. This contrasts with the more typical type of state testing, in which students take several subject tests at once, regardless of when they encountered the material. In New York, for example, high school students must pass five end-of-course Regents Exams: Life Sciences, Math A, and Global History at grades 9 and 10; and English and U.S. History/Government at grade 11. State officials emphasize that each Regents Exam is also aligned to state standards and is not solely limited to the content of a particular course. Some people like EOCs because they provide greater assurance that students have had an opportunity to learn the material being tested. But others feel these exams place too much of the burden of preparing students for exit exams on specific teachers and courses, instead of emphasizing cumulative learning from the lower grades through high school.

The Center's survey confirms that states are trying to make their exams more rigorous and better aligned with state standards. Of the 18 states with exit exams in place for the class of 2002, 10 have minimum competency exams, 7 have standards-based exams, and 2 have end-of-course tests. (These numbers add up to 19, because Texas currently gives students the option of passing either an SBE or a set of end-of-course exams.) Figure 4 shows the configuration of state exams in 2002 and by 2008.

During the next six years, the mix of tests will shift dramatically, away from minimum competency exams and toward the more rigorous standards-based and end-of-course exams. By 2008, only 3 out of the 24 states with exit exams will have MCEs, while 16 will have SBEs and 5 will have EOCs.

Although states make the case that the newer exit exams are more rigorous than the earlier generation of minimum competency tests, little research has been done to determine their actual level of difficulty. Some states clearly indicate that the content of their exit exams is aligned to standards at a certain grade level while other states do not get this specific.

One way to determine the difficulty of a test is to carefully analyze the specific test questions, or "items," in the lingo of test developers. Achieve, Inc. has done "benchmarking" studies of actual items on selected state tests, to see how well they are aligned to state standards and whether they are appropriately rigorous for grade level. The results suggest that state exit exams vary considerably in difficulty. Achieve (2001) gave Massachusetts high marks for its grade 10 language arts and math tests, noting that these tests were rigorous, well-aligned to state standards, and targeted to the appropriate level of difficulty for high school students.

In several other states, Achieve has found that state tests do not cover many of the harder concepts in the state standards. New Jersey's grade 11 exit exam in math was found to be substantially less rigorous than the expectations for high school students embodied in the state standards (Achieve, Inc., 2000a). Central concepts of high school geometry and measurement that were contained in the state's standards—symmetry, congruence, vectors, surface areas, and polygons other than rectangles or triangles, to mention just some—were completely missing from the state math test. (Since the exam was being field-tested at the time of the Achieve study, the state may have improved its coverage in response to Achieve's feedback.)

The Achieve (2000b) review of Indiana concluded that both the standards and assessments in that state were less rigorous than those in many other states, a finding consistent with the state's characterization of its exit exam as a minimum competency test. Achieve judged the reading passages to be too simple and short to elicit much depth of understanding from students and found the math items to be relatively undemanding. Indeed, many items on the 10th grade tests were judged by Achieve to be easier than the corresponding items on the 8th grade tests.

The case of Alaska illustrates some of the tensions state leaders face in deciding how difficult to make their tests. Alaska first administered a new exit exam aligned to state standards in 2000, but the initial results were dismal: almost two-thirds of the state's 10th graders failed the exams on the first try. So the Department of Education decided to postpone the graduation requirement until 2004, to give test developers time to adjust the difficulty of the test and give schools time to align their teaching and curricula with the test content. Rather than saying that it had lowered standards, the Department explained that the original test assessed what the state "would *expect* every student to know and be able to do" by the end of high school, whereas the revised test will measure what the state would "*require* all students to know and be able to do" (emphases added) (Alaska Department of Education, n.d.).

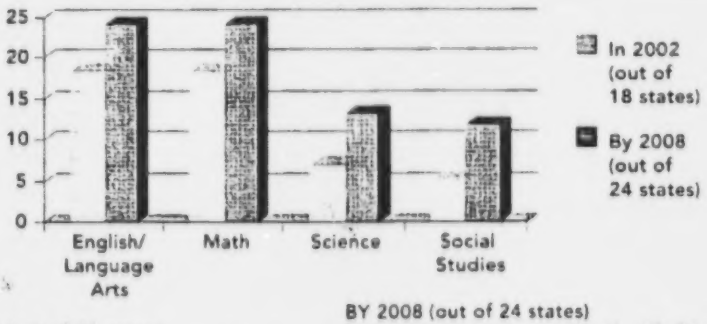
This process of injecting greater rigor into exit exams raises several critical questions: Are the new standards-based and end-of-course exams truly more challenging than their minimum competency predecessors? If so, how do policymakers plan to deal with higher failure rates, at least when the tests are first introduced? Will more challenging tests motivate most students to work harder and learn more in high school? Or will the tests frustrate low achievers and lead to negative consequences, like higher dropout rates?

When Do Students Start Taking These Exams?

States begin giving high school exit exams as early as grade 8 and as late as grade 11, but most are settling on grade 10 as the point when all students are expected to take these exams for the first time. There is a trade-off between giving the test later in high school, after students have been exposed to more high school material, and giving it earlier, which allows more opportunities for retesting and remediation before graduation. End-of-course exams are given when students finish the corresponding courses. Grade levels at which these tests are given vary based on when schools offer the tested subjects. Testing schedules are further complicated by the fact that some states are transitioning to new tests, and are giving both the old and the new tests at the same time.

All states with exit exams allow students who fail the tests initially to retake the parts they did not pass on the first try. Typically, students take a parallel version of the test with slightly different questions. States offer from 2 to 11 retesting opportunities in subsequent grades. In addition, several states allow students to continue taking the test after leaving high school until the age of 21 if they want to keep trying to earn a diploma.

FIGURE 5 **Subject Area Tests That Students Must Pass to Graduate in 2002 and by 2008**



IN 2002 (out of 18 states)

English/language arts – AL, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, VA (18)

Mathematics - AL, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, VA (18)

Science – AL, GA, NM, NY, OH, TN, TX (7)

Social Studies – GA, NM, NY, OH, TX (5)

BY 2008 (out of 24 states)

English/language arts – AK, AL, AZ, CA, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA (24)

Mathematics - AK, AL, AZ, CA, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA (24)

Science – AL, GA, LA, MD, MS, NV, NM, NY, NC, OH, TN, TX, VA (13)

Social Studies – AL, GA, LA, MD, MS, NM, NY, NC, OH, TX, VA (11)

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2002.

Which Subjects Are Tested?

English/language arts and mathematics are by far the most commonly tested subjects, as shown in Figure 5—Subject Area Tests That Students Must Pass to Graduate in 2002 and by 2008. All states with exit exams cover these two subject areas. States don't always use the same names for their subject tests, however. English/language arts, for example, could include tests in writing, reading, English literature, or communications.

In 2002, more than one-third of the states with exit exams required students to pass tests in science and/or social studies. In the next six years, the proportion of states testing students in these subject areas will increase to more than half of the states with exit exams.

What Types of Test Questions Are Used?

Developing and administering any standardized test that will be taken by large numbers of students is a complex undertaking. Most states contract with commercial test developers to help with some or all aspects of the process. Usually the test is designed through a collaborative effort involving state department officials, committees of educators and other stakeholders, and commercial test developers.

One of the most time-consuming steps is determining which test items to use. Each test goes through a pilot testing process, in which test items are tried

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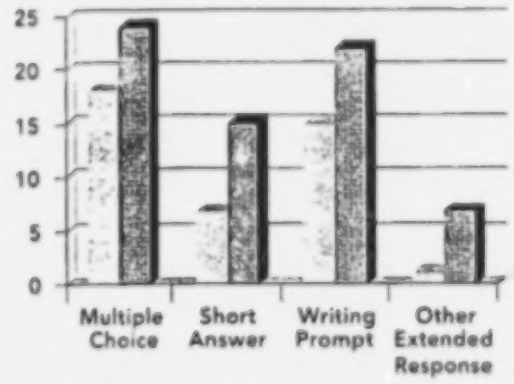
out with a sample of students to see whether they meet technical standards and to weed out questions that may be racially, ethnically, or culturally biased. Often test items are tried out, revised, and tried out again before they are used on a test that counts.

The whole development process generally takes several years, which explains why many states have set target dates for implementing exit exams that are a few years into the future. States can reduce the time somewhat by using test items that commercial test developers have already piloted.

States have begun to use more varied types of test items. All states use some multiple-choice questions, which can be scored by machine and are the least expensive and most objective item type to score. Also, students can respond to multiple-choice questions quickly, so an hour-long test can include lots of questions that touch on many different topics. However, only a few state tests consist entirely of multiple-choice items, and most of these are minimum competency tests that are in the process of being phased out. Alabama has the only new standards-based test that is entirely multiple-choice.

During the 1990s, the "performance assessment" movement encouraged educators and test developers to use more open-ended test items that ask students to demonstrate their knowledge or show more of their thinking processes by creating an answer or product, instead of simply picking the best choice from a set of alternatives. Because students' responses to these kinds of items must be evaluated by human raters, they are more costly and labor intensive to

FIGURE 6 Types of Test Questions



In 2002 (out of 18 states)

By 2008 (out of 24 states)

IN 2002 (out of 18 states)

Multiple choice — AL, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, VA (18)

Short answer — IN, MS, NJ, NM, NY, SC, VA (7)

Writing prompt — FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, OH, SC, TN, TX, (15)

Other extended response — NM, NY (2)

BY 2008 (out of 24 states)

Multiple choice — AK, AL, AZ, CA, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA (24)

Short answer — AK, AZ, FL, IN, LA, MD, MA, MS, NJ, NM, NY, SC, TX, UT, WA (15)

Writing prompt — AK, AZ, CA, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, OH, SC, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA (22)

Other extended response — AZ, FL, LA, MD, NM, NY, WA (7)

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2002.

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score, but most educators agree that open-ended tasks have the potential to elicit higher-level thinking and measure learning skills that more closely parallel what is being taught in classrooms.

States are moving toward including a wider variety of question types in their exit exams, as illustrated in Figure 6—Types of Test Questions.

Although multiple-choice items still predominate, alternative formats are growing in popularity. Writing prompts—test items that ask students to write a particular type of essay—are the most common type of open-ended test item. Fifteen states now include some form of essay writing in their exit exams, and the number is slated to grow to 22 states by 2008. Students are typically asked to write one or two persuasive, informational, or narrative essays on given topics. The essays are usually read by at least two trained raters, who judge each response for qualities of effective writing, such as content, organization, style, sentence structure, grammar, and punctuation. As the examples in Box D demonstrate, states vary in their requirements for writing tasks.

Short answer questions are not as widely used on state exit exams, but they are becoming more popular. Students might be required to fill in a blank, complete a chart or graph, show the approach they used to solve a problem, or write a few sentences explaining a concept in their own words. In 2002, only 7 states are using short answer questions on their exit exams, but by 2008, the number will more than double to 15.

BOX D: SAMPLE WRITING TASKS FROM STATE EXIT EXAMS

Alaska (released item from Alaska's High School Graduation Qualifying Exam)

If you could live anywhere in Alaska or anywhere else in the world, where would you choose? Would you rather live where you do now? Explain why you would choose to move or why you would stay. Make your response as complete as possible. (For this answer, make sure you use complete sentences and check your work for correct spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

Arizona (released item from Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards)

Write a follow-up letter to James Wilcox, the manager of a hotel in Peach Springs. He interviewed you yesterday for a job greeting customers at the hotel's front desk.

Include in your follow-up letter:

- The main reason for writing the letter
- A sentence about a skill you have that is related to the job
- A statement reinforcing your interest in the job

This letter should contain two or three short paragraphs.

Massachusetts (released item from the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System)

Often in works of literature, there are characters—other than the main character—whose presence in the work is essential. From a work of literature you have read in or out of school, select a character, other than the main character, who plays a key role. In a well-developed composition, identify the character and explain why this character is important.

Source: From state departments of education websites, July 2002.

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BOX E: A RANGE OF SAMPLE QUESTIONS FROM STATE EXIT EXAMS IN ALGEBRA

Sample Multiple-choice Question (released item from Virginia's Standards of Learning tests)
Victor bought a computer for $1800. He made a down payment of $200 and will pay the rest in 5 equal payments. If p represents the amount of each payment, which equation can be used to find this amount?

a. 200p$ = $1,800 b. $1,800 + 5$p$ = $200 c. $1,800 + $200 = 5$p$ d. $1,800 = 5$p$ + $200

Sample Short Answer Question (released item from Indiana's Graduation Qualifying Exam)
For each roll of film, the photo shop charges $0.18 per print plus a developing fee. The total cost to have a 24-print roll of film developed and printed is $6.92.

Let d represent the developing fee for a roll of film. On the line below, write an equation that could be solved to find d. You do NOT have to solve the problem.

Equation _____

Sample Extended Response Question (released item from Maryland's High School Assessment)
Two bicycle shops build custom-made bicycles. Bicycle City charges $160 plus $80 for each day that it takes to build the bicycle. Bike Town charges $120 for each day that it takes to build the bicycle.

Complete the following in the Answer Book:

- Write an equation for each store that describes the charge (C) to build a custom-made bicycle in x days.
- For what number of days will the charge be the same at each store? What will be the charge for that number of days? Use mathematics to justify your answer. (If you solve the problem graphically, use the grid provided in the Answer Book to add to your written response.)
- When is it less expensive to use Bicycle City to build a custom-made bicycle than Bike Town? When is it more expensive? Use mathematics to justify your answer.

Source: From state departments of education websites, July 2002

Currently only two state exams call on students to perform a more complex task (other than essay writing) or provide an extended response, but by 2008, 7 state exit exams will include these kinds of test items. For instance, New York's global history exam has a document-based question that asks students to analyze documents about an important historical issue and write an essay using the documents and their knowledge of social studies.

Box E illustrates a range of item types that states are using to assess student knowledge in algebra.

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Question

What major challenges do states face in implementing exit exams?

HIGHLIGHTS

- State policymakers must walk a fine line between setting cutoff scores for exit exams that are high enough to prepare students well for life after graduation but reasonable enough to avoid mass failures. For exit exams to have meaning, however, cutoff scores should be based on concrete standards for what students should know and be able to do by the end of high school. When policymakers set cut scores based primarily on political considerations rather than on meaningful expectations for learning, they undermine the purpose of exit exams.
- Providing students with an opportunity to learn the knowledge and skills represented by rigorous exit exams is central to the fairness of these tests. So far, opportunity to learn appears to be more of a goal than a reality. States must assume more responsibility for guaranteeing that all students, especially those in substandard schools, are actually taught the tested skills beginning in the elementary grades, and for providing students with such vital learning resources as well-qualified teachers, strong curriculum, and extra instructional or remedial services.
- Testing backlash can undermine even a well-designed testing program. But parents, students, and others have legitimate concerns about the fairness and appropriateness of exit exam policies, which policymakers must acknowledge and address if they hope to achieve buy-in for their testing programs. Some states have sustained public support for their testing programs by forming alliances with business leaders or mounting public relations campaigns to explain the tests, counter misleading criticisms, and calm some of the opponents.
- Because exit exams have life-altering consequences for students, they must meet high professional standards. One such standard is to ensure that important decisions aren't made on the basis of a single test score. Although exit exams, by their very nature, operate as a kind of sole criterion for making graduation decisions, several states have set up waivers, extra policies, or special exceptions to offer alternative paths to earn a diploma for students who don't pass the exams after repeated tries.
- Students with disabilities and English language learners are generally being held to the same standards and exam requirements as other students, but many complex issues must be worked out to help these students participate in exit exams and to accurately and fairly measure what they know and can do. Most states offer testing accommodations to students with disabilities and English language learners. Some states have also designed special criteria, alternative assessments, or other paths to a diploma for students with special needs.

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Making Adjustments

States are learning that it isn't easy to bring to reality their visions of effective exit exams. As they try to implement their programs, they face numerous challenges and must resolve several contentious issues.

As researchers Susan Fuhrman, Margaret Goertz, and Mark Duffy (in press) have observed, several states are finding they need to slow down and make "mid-course corrections" in their exit exam policies. In the view of these researchers, policymakers must maintain their commitment to standards-based reform while being flexible enough to make adjustments at least in part to avoid opposition that may derail a state exam altogether. If they weaken exam requirements too much, by reducing rigor or delaying effective dates too far into the future, they may undermine the reform movement they have worked hard to set in motion. On the other hand, if they ignore opposition and critics, they risk provoking boycotts or legal challenges.

Denying a student a high school diploma is clearly one of the most important decisions for which a test can be used, so it is not surprising that exit exams are the source of considerable controversy. Over the years, states have adjusted their exit exam programs in response to high failure rates, political and public opposition, and technical issues. Corrective actions have included such decisions as making the test questions easier, lowering the cutoff score required to pass the test, introducing waivers or other paths to a diploma, or delaying implementation of the exam.

Arizona is one of several states that have delayed their deadlines for withholding diplomas in response to poor student performance on initial test administrations. Arizona postponed its mandate on four different occasions. Other states, including California, are contemplating similar delays.

Massachusetts is among the states that made their graduation tests easier by lowering the cutoff scores, while Alaska changed the content of its test. Michigan switched from a mandatory graduation exam to a differentiated diploma approach, partly in response to community opposition. New York provided alternative paths to a regular diploma in the form of waivers or substitute tests. Wisconsin made the exit exam requirement optional for local districts. And Delaware lowered the stakes and instead instituted a multi-tiered diploma system.

Setting Passing Scores

The difficulty of a test is determined partly by the standards on which it is based and the nature of its questions, and partly by the cutoff score for passing the test. Setting the passing score for an exit exam is one of the most crucial and difficult policy decisions states face. If one imagines academic competence as falling along a continuum, there is no clear point that separates the competent from the incompetent.

As testing experts often emphasize, it can be misleading to compare two students based on small differences in test scores. With any pass/fail test, there will always be some students who score just below the cutoff score and others who score just above it, even though they do not truly differ in achievement

levels. Rather, the slight difference in their scores is due to what testing experts call measurement error. Measurement error refers to the fact that any test score summarizes a student's performance on a particular set of test questions on a particular day. A student may get a higher score than his true ability would indicate if he guesses the answers to a few questions correctly; or he may get a lower score if there are a lot of distractions in the testing room, or if he doesn't understand the wording of a particular question, even though he does understand the underlying concept being tested. Some degree of measurement error is unavoidable; tests are not perfect measures. This is one reason why testing experts warn against basing important decisions on a single test score.

Setting cutoff scores is a judgmental process. The most widely used technique is called the "Angoff method," named after measurement expert William Angoff, who developed it in the 1970's. The basic process is that a panel of experts (such as teachers, curriculum developers, and sometimes parents, business people, and university faculty) look carefully at each test item and estimate the probability that a minimally competent performer—a student who, in the panel member's view, is just competent enough to deserve passing the high school exit exam—will answer the item correctly. (Alternatively, the panel member might imagine 100 such students and estimate how many of them would answer the item correctly.) The average estimate for each item provides a kind of minimum passing level for the item; these estimates are added together to determine a passing score for the entire test.

Typically, state leaders view the panel's recommended cut score that results from this procedure as advisory rather than set in stone. Often state leaders decide to lower the cut score (making it easier to pass the test) once they analyze student performance data and realize that large proportions of students will fail the test.

Policymakers must walk the fine line between making cutoff scores reasonable enough that most students will be able to graduate, yet high enough that a high school diploma signifies competencies to enter the workforce or college. That middle ground is often elusive, as state experiences attest.

In 2001, California administered its new exit exam to 9th graders on a voluntary basis, but it will be mandatory for the state's 10th graders in the future. Although the test developer and external evaluator had raised concerns about basing the cut score decision on the results of volunteer 9th graders, the State Board of Education established passing scores for the test—60% correct for English/language arts and 55% correct for mathematics. These scores fell below the 70% cutoff proposed by the panel of experts during the standard-setting process. But even with the lower passing scores, only 42% of 9th graders who took the two tests passed both parts. The low pass rates may be partly due to the fact that it was 9th graders rather than 10th graders that were tested during that initial administration. The test was supposed to count for the graduating class of 2004, but California policymakers are considering delaying the exit exam requirement, due to questions about the cut scores and other concerns including whether students have had an opportunity to learn the material tested.

Massachusetts took a somewhat different approach. Here, the State Board of Education decided to set the passing score at the bottom of the state's "needs

improvement" performance category. Students only need to answer 40% of the items correctly on each of the language arts and mathematics sections to pass the test.

As these and other examples show, decisions about where to set cut scores can become political. The resulting score may end up being pragmatic from a political standpoint but arbitrary from an educational standpoint, especially when the cutoff score bears little relation to meaningful expectations for what high school graduates should know and be able to do. When policymakers set arbitrary cutoff scores, it weakens what states are trying to accomplish by setting standards in the first place. It also undermines the whole rationale for having exit exams—namely, to give more meaning to high school diplomas by tying them to an explicit level of competency.

Ensuring Opportunity to Learn

Providing students with an opportunity to learn the material being tested is at the heart of the debate over exit exams. It's a matter of basic fairness not to punish students for failing to learn material that they didn't have an adequate opportunity to learn, but the nuances become complicated and controversial, not in the least because ensuring that all students have a true opportunity to learn can be a far-reaching and expensive undertaking.

Opportunity to learn is a comprehensive concept that involves providing students with the full range of instructional services and supports that are necessary for them to meet state standards. These supports include well-qualified teachers, effective curriculum aligned with state standards, high-quality instructional materials and equipment, extra learning time or special teaching methods for low-performing students, remediation, and other resources.

Opportunity to learn does not begin in high school, but rather is a shared responsibility among grades K through 12. To make sure that standards, curriculum, and instruction are coherent and build logically toward the knowledge and skills represented on the exit exams, states should work backwards, looking at these elements from high school down to the elementary grades.

Court rulings on the constitutionality of high school exit exams (e.g., *Debra P. v. Turlington*, 1981, 1984 and *G.I. Forum et al. v. Texas Education Agency*, 2000) have identified specific criteria that educational agencies should use to determine whether high school students have had sufficient opportunity to learn material tested. (See Box F—Court Rundown.) These criteria include ensuring that students: 1) have been given adequate advance notice of the graduation testing requirements; 2) have been afforded multiple opportunities to take the test; 3) have been taught the tested skills; and 4) have been provided with opportunities for successful remediation efforts.

Our analysis focuses on the latter two criteria, which are often the most difficult for states to achieve and demonstrate in practice.

BOX F: COURT RUNDOWN

Graduation testing policies have been the subject of numerous legal challenges. Plaintiffs and courts have invoked the U.S. Constitution, federal civil rights statutes, and other judicial decisions to determine whether specific testing practices are fair and appropriate. Legal challenges are likely to increase if failure rates go up with the introduction of more rigorous exams. Below is a list of some key court decisions related to exit exams.

1981 Debra P. v. Turlington. A group of African-American students challenged the Florida exit exam as being racially biased. In this landmark case, a U. S. court of appeals ruled that: 1) students have a legally recognized property interest in receiving a high school diploma; 2) the graduation test must be a fair measure of what students have been taught; and 3) students must have adequate advance notice of the high stakes testing requirements.

1981 Board of Education v. Ambach. In New York, parents of two students with disabilities challenged a local ruling which invalidated the diplomas the children had been awarded for successfully completing their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The state had recently enacted a new law requiring students to pass minimum competency exit exams, and both students had failed the tests. The court found that special education students suffered a violation of protected property interests when they were denied high school diplomas without having received adequate notice and preparation.

1982 Brookhart v. Illinois State Board of Education. In perhaps the most significant federal testing case arising from the special education context, the court found that children with disabilities could be denied diplomas if they failed exit exams, as long as they had received sufficient notice and had been taught the knowledge and skills that the exams measured. The court recognized that students with disabilities might require more advance notice and opportunities to prepare for such testing than other general education students.

1997 G.I. Forum and Image de Tejas v. Texas Education Agency. The plaintiffs argued that Texas's state test had a disparate impact against African American and Latino students. The judge did not deny that a large gap existed in pass rates between white and minority students, but ruled in favor of the defendants. The judge concluded that the state had demonstrated "educational necessity"—in other words, that the high-stakes test approach was the only way to force improved outcomes in Texas education.

2001 Rene v. Reed. The plaintiffs argued that they had not been exposed to the curriculum tested on Indiana's high school exit exam. The Court of Appeals of Indiana found that the state's requirements to provide remedial assistance to all students who did not meet academic standards made it implausible that the students were not exposed to the subjects tested throughout their high school career. Instead of ruling against the exit exam, the court concluded that the appropriate remedy was not to offer everyone diplomas, but "to offer the student additional remediation and opportunities to acquire the necessary skills."

2002 Chapman v. California Department of Education. In California, students with disabilities filed a lawsuit challenging the state exit exam. Before the trial began, the students sought a "preliminary injunction," or emergency court order, on several issues related to the fairness of the tests for students with disabilities that they said could not wait until after the trial. In response, a federal judge ordered California to allow accommodations in testing procedures for students with disabilities. The judge also ordered the state to develop an alternative form of the test for students who cannot be appropriately assessed by a standardized test. This ruling represents the first time that a state has been ordered to adjust its high school exam for students with disabilities.

Source: Compiled by Center on Education Policy, July 2002.

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TESTING WHAT STUDENTS HAVE BEEN TAUGHT Simply put, exit exams should test what students have been taught. While most people would agree with this principle, it is difficult to ensure in our decentralized system, with more than 22,000 public high schools, 1.2 million public high school teachers, and 13.5 million public high school students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002a). To measure opportunity to learn, states could begin by looking at their formal curriculum standards to see whether they include the knowledge and skills that the test is designed to measure. A next step might be to analyze textbooks, syllabi, lesson plans, and other materials to see how well the planned instruction covers the content of the test. But what ultimately matters is the *actual* curriculum and instruction being delivered in classrooms. This is much harder to judge, because it involves reviewing daily instructional materials and observing teachers teaching in a sample of classrooms. Most states have not taken these steps, but some are starting to do so.

A complicating issue is that sometimes it *is* appropriate to test students on material they have not been taught. That is when the test is being used to find out whether schools are teaching the required curricula, or to spur them to do so. Problems arise, however, when states use the same test for these sorts of program evaluation purposes *and* to hold individual students accountable for learning. Some states are satisfying both of these purposes by planning a gap of several years between the time new tests are introduced and the time high stakes for students take effect. This gives schools more time to align their curriculum and teaching with the state test.

SUPPORT FOR REMEDIATION An important part of opportunity to learn is providing students who fail exit exams with instructional support to help them succeed the next time around. Possible activities include providing special after-school tutoring or summer school programs, modifying curriculum and/or instruction based on test results, providing professional development on effective remediation techniques, and implementing support programs for parents. Many states have policies that require local districts to provide some type of remediation to students who don't pass the test on the first attempt. Usually, the details and funding are the responsibility of the district or school.

In many cases, professional development for teachers is a necessary part of mounting a meaningful remediation program. Simply providing students with more of the same instruction that didn't work the first time is usually not the answer. Teachers must be trained in effective ways to help low-achieving students succeed.

Some states provide support—in the form of funding, leadership, professional development, or high-quality instructional materials—to local districts and schools. Examples include the following:

- In Alabama, Governor Don Siegelman's initiative called "High Hopes" allocated $6 million in 2000 for remediation to students who do not pass the exit exam. The number of students in each district who have not passed is calculated, and the $6 million is divided by this figure to arrive at a per pupil amount. Councils in local districts, comprised of the superintendent, educators, parents, students, institutions of higher education, and community-based organizations, must then design a comprehensive plan for pro-

viding this remediation and must apply for funds to the State Department of Education. Remediation may be provided after school, during the summer, or during classroom time, but is not to take the place of regular instruction.

- In Indiana, the state provides $25 million for remediation or prevention grants for all districts that haven't met state standards in all the tested grade levels. Local districts must provide a match of two local dollars for every state dollar. Schools must have a remediation plan for students who do not pass the test and may provide preventive remediation to students at any grade who are at risk of failing the test. The first class that had to pass the Graduation Qualifying Exam (the class of 2000) also received an additional $5 million in remediation funds.
- In Virginia, the state provided $29.6 million in remediation funds for 1998-2000 for students who were struggling to pass the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. The money was earmarked to support additional hours of instruction and teacher training on remediation techniques. To support school districts as they implemented the SOLs, the state also allocated $6.2 million for teacher materials in 1997; $55 million for classroom technology in 1997; $6.7 million for the Early Reading Initiative to support K-5 reading standards in 1999; $25.1 million for teacher training and staff development in 1998-2000; and $20 million for graphing calculators and scientific probes to support math and science SOLs.

Not all states have been as open-handed. Only half of the states with mandatory graduation tests also allocate state funds for instructional assistance to students who fail (*Education Week,* 2002).

So far, opportunity to learn appears to be more of a goal than a reality. Distressing inequities exist between schools and districts in terms of numbers of well-qualified teachers, per pupil funding, support services, a safe environment, and other important preconditions for learning—inequities that are too often mirrored by gaps in student achievement. In urban and disadvantaged rural districts in particular, a disproportionately large number of teachers are teaching subjects for which they are not fully trained or credentialed. Can their students be said to have an adequate opportunity to learn?

If state leaders really expect exit exam policies to improve teaching and learning, then they must assume greater responsibility for guaranteeing opportunity to learn. It's hypocritical for states to impose challenging exit exam requirements, and then leave schools, teachers, and students to fend for themselves.

Building Public Buy-in for Exit Exams

Building support for exit exams among parents, students, teachers, and the public is another major challenge. Because exit exams affect so many people in ways that matter, they tend to attract opposition. The process of enacting and implementing an exit exam program involves numerous negotiations—from garnering support in the state legislature to meeting with teachers to determine what should be included in the test.

According to public opinion polls, standards-based reform continues to enjoy widespread support among parents, students, and teachers nationwide. Polls generally show that at least 8 in 10 parents and a similar proportion of teachers think students should have to pass a statewide test before graduating from high school (Business Roundtable, 2000; Public Agenda, 2002). Yet one could easily reach the conclusion that an anti-testing backlash is rampant, based on the attention that protests receive in the media. Groups with serious issues regarding high-stakes testing tend to be more vocal and aggressive in getting out their messages than the broad majority of people who are relatively satisfied with the status quo. They may also represent groups for whom the negative effects are more pronounced or potentially damaging.

Nevertheless, states cannot ignore the opponents of these tests for two big reasons: first, vocal opposition could eventually undermine broader public support for the tests, thereby threatening the whole testing program; and second, the opponents raise serious issues that states must confront in a straightforward way.

Resistance to exit exams and other high-stakes tests comes from a variety of constituencies. Some of the protesters are parents of average- or low-achieving students who are concerned about the increased pressure on their children and the unfairness of denying students a diploma based on a single test. Civil rights advocacy groups often attack the equity of exit exam policies in the public and legal arenas because they feel that low-income and minority students are more likely to be negatively affected.

Opposition to high stakes tests has also come from parents of high-achieving students and teachers in high performing schools who feel that the tests are diverting attention from a broader and richer curriculum. Last year, more than half of the parents of 8th graders in Scarsdale, a wealthy suburb of New York City, took their children home when tests were given. They rebelled only when the state added science and social studies tests in the 8th grade, forcing many teachers to miss well over a week of class time to prepare for and administer the tests, and curtailing such beloved interdisciplinary projects as the "hurricane unit" and "the Colonial fair" (Traub, 2002).

Massachusetts has been the site of the most vociferous anti-testing campaign. In a protest against that state's testing program, hundreds of high school students and some elementary students boycotted the state tests (Gehring, 2000a). A few months later, the state's largest teachers' union launched a biting $600,000 advertising campaign that urged citizens to "Say No to the MCAS Graduation Requirement." One union-supported TV ad showed a nervous student struggling through the state exit exam while a somber voiceover derided the "flawed and unfair" and "do or die" MCAS test (Gehring, 2000b.) Most recently, the Cambridge school board and a handful of other Massachusetts school boards have voted to scrap the mandatory MCAS as a graduation requirement, despite concerns about reprisal from the state (Gehring, 2002a).

The Massachusetts example is particularly interesting because Achieve's 2001 benchmarking study of the testing program gave the state positive marks. This situation suggests that even if states have effectively addressed the technical issues of testing, they cannot overlook political issues. Each state's political context is different, however, and will require a unique combination of responses.

Some states have managed to calm potential opposition without sacrificing major aspects of the testing program. When Texas made the transition from a minimum competency test to a more rigorous standards-based exam called the TAAS, the state initially set passing thresholds on the TAAS at the 60% level, so that failure rates wouldn't be too shocking at first and minority students wouldn't be disproportionately penalized. The plan was to gradually ratchet up the cut score to 70% over a two-year period. In 1990, the first year of testing, 38,000 students out of the 165,000 who took the new TAAS failed to meet the 60% threshold. After two additional rounds of retesting, the number of failing students shrunk to about 8,000. These students did not receive diplomas on time in May 1991, although nearly a quarter received them later after passing the tests during a summer administration. In 1992, after considerable controversy and debate, the State Board of Education held its ground and went ahead with its plan to raise the threshold to 70%. More than one-fourth of the 11th graders who took the test with the new cutoff score initially failed, but through retesting and targeted support, the proportion of students denied diplomas shrank to about 5% (Hess, 2002).

Some states have mounted successful efforts to build stakeholders' support for exit exams, often by forming alliances with business leaders, a constituency that has a direct stake in the quality of American schools and has been among the leading advocates for stronger testing requirements. National and local business groups have helped to launch campaigns in support of state account-

BOX G: MARYLAND STAYS THE COURSE

Maryland has been deemed remarkably successful in sticking with its standards-based reform effort, according to an external review by Achieve. Achieve attributes the state's success largely to the political will of state leaders, along with the support of the business community, which is often the linchpin that enables reform to survive turnover in political leadership.

The Maryland Business Round Table (MBRT), recognized as one of the strongest state business groups in the country, has conducted campaigns for several years aimed at raising student achievement. One statewide effort, called *Achievement Counts*, encourages employers to ask students for their high school transcripts as part of the hiring process. Students' scores on the High School Assessments are now reported on all student transcripts, though diplomas will not be withheld for several more years. The program includes a public relations campaign to communicate with students about the importance of high achievement. The MBRT also makes print and web-based information about reform efforts available to parents through their employers.

Source: Achieve, 2002.

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ability systems, including exit exams. As outlined in Box G, Maryland has kept its standards-based reforms on track, in part, by maintaining a strong relationship with the business community.

Using Tests Appropriately

When tests can have life-altering consequences for individuals, as exit exams do, testing experts recommend that certain professional standards be followed to make sure these tests are designed and used appropriately.

One important standard is that tests should not be used as the sole determining factor in a major decision like the awarding of a diploma, but should be used in conjunction with other measures. Another key standard is that high-stakes tests should meet high standards for reliability, validity, and fairness. In addition, high-stakes tests require heightened precautions and user education to ensure the security of the test and the accuracy of its scoring. The cheating scandals and scoring errors that seem to pop up periodically not only invalidate the test results, but also can seriously jeopardize the public's faith in the testing program.

In general, states are doing the best they can, given the current state of testing technology, to ensure that exit exams are well designed and appropriately used.

USING EXIT EXAMS AS A SOLE CRITERION FOR GRADUATION

Professional testing standards recognize that tests are not perfect measures and state that, "In educational settings, a decision or characterization that will have a major impact on a student should not be made on the basis of a single test score. Other relevant information should be taken into account if it will enhance the overall validity of the decision" (American Educational Research Association et al., 1999, Standard 13.7, p.146).

The public agrees. Although most citizens support the concept of exit exams, large majorities of students (62%), parents (75%), teachers (89%), employers (81%), and professors (83%) also say it would be "wrong to use the results of just one test to decide whether a student gets promoted or graduates" (Public Agenda, 2002).

Yet exit exams, by their very nature, operate as a sort of a sole criterion. Most states with exit exams require students to satisfactorily complete all of their coursework *and* pass the exam. Does that constitute use of multiple measures? Not really. Each requirement essentially acts as a single measure, because a failure to achieve either one bars the path to a diploma. For students who finish the coursework but do not pass the exam, the test becomes the sole criterion for graduation. In contrast, a true multiple measures scenario might allow good grades to compensate for failing the exit exam. But these policies are rare and have their own drawbacks; for example, many people do not trust the meaning or credibility of course grades.

Several states with exit exams have put in place extra policies, exceptions for special cases, or alternative paths to a diploma to ensure that their programs are legally defensible and otherwise fair to students who don't pass the tests. These policies operate somewhat like multiple measures, but without weaken-

ing the essence of the graduation requirement. Policies vary among states in terms of their flexibility and availability, but the following examples show the range of possibilities:

Multiple opportunities for retesting. All states provide students with multiple opportunities for retesting, which is the simplest way to make sure that graduation decisions are not based on a single test score. Typically students will take parallel versions of a test with slightly different test questions. The logic is that if students still cannot pass after multiple tries, it is safe to infer that they have not mastered the material being tested and to deny them a diploma. In at least 6 states (Alaska, Georgia, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Utah), students who do not pass the exit exam by the end of grade 12 receive a lower-level "certificate of attendance," or something similar, and usually have additional chances to take the test and earn the regular diploma after leaving high school, up through age 21.

Alternative state assessments. In New Jersey, 12th graders who have met all graduation requirements but have not passed the regular state exit exam after numerous tries are eligible to participate in the Special Review Assessment process (SRA), an alternative state assessment. If a student passes the SRA, he or she is eligible to graduate, but students who do not pass either the regular or alternative assessments will not receive a diploma.

Substitute tests. At least two states (New York and Virginia) allow schools to use substitute tests in place of their state exit exams, which in both states are end-of-course exams. In New York, advocates for alternative schools argued that preparing for the state exit exams would alter the unique curriculum and character of these schools, many of which successfully educate students who have done poorly in regular schools. Advocates also argued that uniform tests are inherently unfair because students are different, and the best way for one student to demonstrate what he or she knows may not be the best for another. The New York State Department of Education has now approved the use of certain AP, International Baccalaureate and SAT II tests as substitutes for a Regents exam. Other substitute measures may be approved in the future if they are aligned with the state standards and are at least as rigorous as the corresponding Regents exam. Similarly, in Virginia, students can substitute scores on 40 other exams, including AP or International Baccalaureate tests, to earn their diplomas.

Waivers or appeals processes. At least four states (Indiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Mississippi) have waivers or appeals processes in place for students who repeatedly fail state exit exams. As already mentioned, Indiana permits students to graduate without passing the test as long as they have a grade point average of C or above in required courses and a letter of recommendation from a teacher in the failed subject area or from the high school principal. Similarly, Massachusetts has approved an appeals process that permits high school seniors who have solid academic records but have repeatedly failed the exit exam to present supplemental evidence of their achievement to a special board appointed by the Commissioner of Education.

DEVELOPING VALID, RELIABLE, AND FAIR TESTS Testing experts advise that large-scale tests, especially those used for accountability purposes, should be valid. By validity, testing professionals experts mean that the test measures

what it claims to measure—in this case, what students were actually taught—and that its scores lead people to draw conclusions that are sound and supported by evidence and theory. In addition, exit exams should be reliable; in other words, they should produce very similar if not identical scores if the same student took the test on two different occasions (assuming no learning occurs in between) or in two different settings.

The exams should also be fair. This means that the test questions should not be culturally biased; that the exam should be administered in a way that treats all examinees equitably; that test-takers should have an opportunity to learn the material being tested; and that the scores should not underestimate or overestimate the competencies of members of a particular group, such as a racial or ethnic group.

States face a formidable challenge in developing a testing program that meets all these conditions. Today's tests are the product of decades of research and development, but in practice, it is impossible to design a test that is free of error and thoroughly valid for all the inferences that people will want to draw from the results. Commercial test developers and state officials continue to work on designing better tests, but some of the more promising and revolutionary applications are years away from being ready for large-scale use (National Research Council, 2001b). In the meantime, states are generally doing a satisfactory job with the technologies available.

Including Special Populations in Testing

Standards-based reform stresses that all students, including those with special learning needs, will benefit from being taught to the same high standards as other students. Toward this end, federal and state laws now require students with disabilities and English language learners to have access to the general curriculum, whenever appropriate, and to be included in state assessments.

The rationale for these requirements is that unless these students are included in efforts to raise standards, their needs will be too easily ignored and the expectations held for them will be too low. These inclusive policies were also adopted because significant numbers of students with disabilities and English language learners were being excluded from state-mandated testing, especially testing for accountability purposes. Before these inclusive policies, schools had an incentive to exempt students with disabilities and English language learners from testing, out of fear that they might score low and bring down the school's average test scores when it came time to determine accountability ratings.

States and school districts must also offer testing accommodations, where necessary, to students with disabilities and English language learners. Accommodations are changes in the testing situation that make it possible for students with special needs to participate meaningfully in the test. Examples include changes in: (a) test settings, such as administering tests one-on-one or in small groups; (b) test schedules, such as giving students extended time to finish or extra breaks; (c) test presentation, such as allowing students to use magnifying equipment or use readers, signers, or transcribers; and (d) response modes, such as allowing students to dictate answers. Accommodations are per-

missible only if they address factors unrelated to the competency being tested and do not invalidate or change the nature of what is being tested. For instance, if the purpose of a writing test is to assess students' handwriting ability, that goal would be substantially altered if a student with a disability were allowed to dictate responses. But if the purpose of a writing test is to communicate thoughts or ideas, handwriting could be seen as incidental, so allowing a dictated answer probably would not change the assessment (National Research Council, 1997). For many types of accommodations, however, it is far from clear whether they alter the nature of what is being tested. Nor has a clear set of criteria been developed to determine which accommodations are appropriate for which students under what conditions.

States must balance several competing concerns when they design testing policies and accommodations for students with disabilities and English language learners, including the following:

- The goal is to hold all students accountable to the same graduation standards. But for some students with disabilities or English language learners, a conventional exit exam may not be a valid measure of what they know and can do. It is particularly critical that these students have alternate routes for demonstrating mastery—in other words, multiple measures for high-stakes graduation decisions.
- In some states, students with disabilities are held to a different set of criteria for earning a regular diploma; but these policies could be considered unfair to regular education students who fail the exit exam and do not have the same alternatives.
- Increasing the graduation rate for all students is one of our nations' goals; but more stringent graduation requirements may lead to increased dropout rates, especially among students with disabilities and English language learners.
- The challenge of ensuring that students have an opportunity to learn all that is being tested is magnified for students with disabilities and English language learners, who may require extra programs, staff, and other resources to help them achieve state standards.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires states to include all students with disabilities in state tests, with appropriate accommodations where necessary. For the small number of students whose disabilities are of a nature or severity that they cannot participate meaningfully in conventional tests, the law requires states to develop alternate assessments. A student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 plan under the Rehabilitation Act specifies whether it is appropriate for that student to be tested with certain accommodations or to take an alternate assessment. In 2002, 17 of 18 states offered accommodations to students with disabilities taking high school exit exams, and by 2008, 22 of 24 states intend to do so.

In addition, some states offer alternate assessments or exemptions, so that students with disabilities who have difficulty passing exit exams can earn a regular diploma. Our data indicate that 6 states offer exemptions for students with disabilities, and 5 provide alternate assessments. By 2008, the number offering

exemptions will decrease to 5, while the number providing alternate assessments will increase to 9. Table 4 shows which states offer various options for students with disabilities to earn a regular diploma.

As mentioned earlier, states also offer a less than standard diploma, such as a certificate of attendance or completion, to all students who do not meet graduation requirements, including those with special needs. And some states have a special education diploma that is available only to students with IEPs.

States are also required to implement policies to ensure proper reporting of the participation and performance of students with disabilities on large-scale assessments, but the National Center on Educational Outcomes found that some states are not yet doing this (Bielinski et al., 2001).

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS When students are not proficient in the language of the assessment, their scores will not accurately reflect their knowledge of the subject being tested (unless, of course, the subject being tested is English proficiency). This makes it difficult for English language learners to participate in large-scale assessments.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires that students with limited English proficiency be included in the academic assessments administered to all students. Whenever practicable, assessments must be in the language and form most likely to yield accurate data on student achievement. When yearly academic assessments in the student's native language are not available, the state

TABLE 4: STATE OPTIONS FOR ALLOWING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES TO EARN A REGULAR DIPLOMA

Students with Disabilities	In 2002	By 2008
Accommodations	AL, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, VA (17)	AL, AK, AZ, CA, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, SC, TN, VA, UT (22)
Exemptions	GA, NJ, NM, NY, OH, TX (6)	GA, NJ, NM, NY, OH (5)
Alternate assessments	MN, NJ, NM, NY, TX (5)	AK, AZ, MA, MN, NJ, NM, NY, TX, UT (9)

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of educations, 2002.

TABLE 5: STATE OPTIONS FOR ALLOWING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS TO EARN A REGULAR DIPLOMA

English Language Learners	In 2002	By 2008
Accommodations	AL, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NC, OH, VA, TN (15)	AL, AZ, FL, GA, IN, LA, MD, MA, MN, MS, NV, NJ, NM, NC, OH, TN, VA, UT (18)
Exemptions	NJ, NM (2)	NM (1)
Alternate assessments	NJ, NM (2)	NJ, NM (2)
Test in other language	MN, NJ, NM, NY (4)	MA, MN, NJ, NM, NY (5)

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of educations, 2002.

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must make every effort to develop them. Generally, limited English proficient students who have attended school in the U.S. for three consecutive years must be assessed with tests in English. Beginning with school year 2002-03, the Act also requires an annual assessment of all limited English proficient children in their English oral language, reading, and writing skills.

All states with exit exams require English language learners to pass the same tests as other students, with options for accommodations or temporary exemptions, depending on how long students have been in the country. Table 5 shows the various options being offered by states to allow English language learners to earn a regular diploma.

In 2002, 15 of 18 states offered accommodations to English language learners; by 2008, 18 of 24 states will do so. Some states allow accommodations for students who have been in the country for a few years or less, while others allow accommodations only for English language learners with a special education IEP. Two states, New Jersey and New Mexico, exempt some English language learners from their exit exams. New Jersey allows these exempted students to earn a regular diploma by demonstrating their mastery in their native language through the Special Review Assessment process and by passing an English fluency test.

However, the accommodations most often used for English language learners—such as extended testing time, small group administration, or giving the test in a separate location—do not directly address a student's language proficiency. The most promising accommodations for English language learners—such as making tests available in bilingual or translated versions, allowing students to dictate responses, reading aloud test directions, or simplifying the language (but not the content) of the test—are used the least often (Vincent and Schenck, 2001). More research is needed to determine the actual effectiveness of various accommodations for English language learners.

Only four states provide versions of exit exams (other than English/language arts subtests) translated into other languages. This number will increase to five states by 2008. Minnesota, for instance, offers its tests in four approved languages: Spanish, Hmong, Vietnamese, and Somali. New York's end-of-course exams are translated into even more languages.

Conclusion

High school exit exams are a growing trend. Many states are adopting these tests as part of a larger strategy to raise student achievement in public schools. No one is quite sure whether exit exams will increase student learning as hoped for, or whether they will have unintended negative effects. But state policymakers are under pressure to take actions to improve education, and beefing up standards and graduation requirements has wide support among parents, teachers, and even students.

If states are going to implement exit exams—and clearly, they are—then they should do it with full knowledge of what the research says, which issues are most important to address, and what other states are doing. This report is one effort to provide this kind of information, but clearly more research is needed. In the case studies and state profiles that follow, as well as in the main report, we have tried both to summarize state policies and to highlight promising state strategies that could be helpful to other states. There are better and worse ways of implementing high-stakes testing. We hope this report will help policymakers adopt policies that will lead to increased student learning, rather than to higher dropout rates or other negative consequences.

Case Studies

The Center on Education Policy conducted case studies of the high school exit exam systems of five states: Alaska, Georgia, Indiana, New York, and Ohio. These brief case studies provide a more detailed picture of state exams than the main report allows. However, they are not intended to be exhaustive reports on each state. Instead, we have chosen to discuss how some crosscutting issues play out in particular states and to highlight some unique features of each state's exit exam system.

The case studies include a brief description and history of exit exams in the state. They show results from recent administrations of the exams, including data broken out, where available, by students' race or ethnicity, low-income status (as determined by eligibility for free or reduced-price school lunches), disability status (as determined by participation in special education programs), and status as English language learners. The case studies also describe noteworthy features and actions of each state's exam system, and challenges and issues to watch.

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ALASKA

HIGHLIGHTS

- Low pass rates on Alaska's first administration of its high school exit exam surprised the state. In response, the state delayed consequences for students, adjusted the difficulty of its exam, and started working for adequate funding for its schools.

- With a longer testing phase-in period and a broader assessment program in place, Alaska might have had better early results with its high school exit exam.

In 1997, Alaska's legislature passed a law that directed the Department of Education to develop the Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Examination (HSGQE). The HSGQE is a minimum competency examination that tests students in reading, writing, and mathematics. Sophomores first took the exam in Spring 2000. The class of 2004 will be the first cohort of students required to pass these tests to receive a diploma. For further information about the HSGQE, please refer to the Alaska Fact Sheet in the state profiles section of this report.

Results

The most recent data on initial pass rates for the HSGQE are from Spring 2001, the second year the test was administered. These results were not used to determine whether students were granted diplomas.

Percentage of 10th Grade Students Passing the HSGQE on Their First Attempt (Spring 2001 Administration)

	Reading	Writing	Mathematics
All students	66%	47%	44%
Alaska Native	37%	23%	23%
Asian	52%	39%	38%
Black	44%	29%	20%
Hispanic	52%	34%	30%
White	78%	56%	54%
Free or reduced lunch	34%	20%	19%
Students with disabilities	21%	4%	9%
English language learners	25%	15%	16%

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information from http://www.eed.state.ak.us, July 2002.

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As with most states, the results show large gaps in student achievement based on race/ethnicity, language proficiency, and disability status. The gap is particularly acute for Alaska's native population. On each of the HSGQEs, Alaska Natives are less than half as likely to pass as white students. In some rural districts that are primarily Alaska Native, not one student passed all three sections of the exam (Jones and Ongtooguk, 2002).

Noteworthy Features and Actions

The HSGQE was first administered in 2000. When the results were released, they were surprising, especially in math. Initial pass rates on the exams were 75% in reading, 48% in writing, and 33% in mathematics. The state responded in three main ways.

WAITING ON WITHHOLDING DIPLOMAS Alaska put off withholding diplomas for two years so that the class of 2004 rather than the class of 2002 would be the first to be denied diplomas. This is not an uncommon response, despite the risk that delays could weaken support for the reforms. Other states have also chosen to postpone their requirements rather than face the backlash that might occur if significant numbers of diplomas are withheld.

Alaska might have avoided this situation if the state had built into its testing schedule a longer phase-in period. Originally, the first cohort of students tested was to be the first cohort to be denied diplomas. The additional years of testing with no consequences for students would have allowed the state more time to analyze and adjust cut scores if necessary. This approach would have also given teachers, administrators, and students more time to familiarize themselves with the testing program, which might have eased the transition.

The issue of allowing people time to become familiar with a test is particularly relevant in Alaska's case, because the state's wider school accountability system did not become law until one year after the HSGQE did. In 1998, Senate Bill 36 required the state to develop student performance standards and benchmark tests in grades 3, 6, and 8 by 2000, the same year that the HSGQE was to be given for the first time. If the state had a history of testing linked to standards at that time, the adjustment to the HSGQE might have been easier.

ADJUSTING THE DIFFICULTY OF THE TEST In March 2002, students took a new version of the HSGQE "refocused to measure the minimum competencies of essential skills." The state asserts that it has not lowered classroom standards, but rather has changed "the emphasis of the standards on the test." A recent Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document produced by the state notes that the first version of the exam measured what the state would "like all students to know," while the second measures what the state should "require all students to know and be able to do prior to receiving a diploma," a less rigorous standard. In other words, the first version of the exam aimed to assess what the state would wish its students to achieve, while the second version aims to assess what the state can reasonably expect students to achieve. This new set of expectations is supposed to be more in line with the legislature's original intent.

By refocusing the goal of the exam rather than continuing with the old version of the exam, Alaska is attempting to give students a fairer opportunity to perform well. The FAQ document states, "At some point with improvements to our instructional program we may get there [students leaving school with what the state would like them to know and be able to do], but it is unfair to deny students diplomas while we improve the system."

Several states simply lower cut scores to make sure that more students pass their exit exams. However, Alaska has attempted to take a more philosophical stance in adjusting the difficulty of its exam.

INCREASED FUNDING TO ENSURE ADEQUACY OF THE SYSTEM Alaska has used accountability results to push for more funding for education. In December 2000, Alaska Governor Tony Knowles appointed the Education Funding Task Force to ensure that more students meet the state's accountability requirements. While this move was not solely in response to low pass rates on the HSGQE, it did factor into the creation of the task force.

In February 2001, the task force reported that the state's education system was inadequately funded for students to meet the standards of the accountability system. The commission recommended that the state spend an additional $100 million over the next five years to meet its accountability requirements. The funds were to be used to provide direct instructional intervention for students not meeting standards, increase teacher salaries, improve facilities maintenance, align the curriculum to state standards, provide additional assistance for low performing schools, update instructional materials, and carry out a variety of other goals. Implementing the first year of the task force plan would have cost $42.4 million. The legislature allocated an additional $28 million—less than the full amount recommended by the task force—for programs and services for fiscal year 2002.

Even with its moderate successes, the Education Funding Task Force has not declared victory. It continues to fight for its goals and for future successes. In its second and most recent report, the task force states that "adequate state funding has not been provided so that schools are able to maintain an appropriate level of education services . . . As a result, it is likely that many students have not had the opportunity to meet higher state academic standards." If Alaska's continued efforts lead to better student outcomes, it will provide an important lesson for states across the country.

Challenges and Issues to Watch

2002 TEST SCORES The results for the 2002 HSGQE will be the first set of scores to reflect the adjustments made to the exam. These scores are supposed to be the first to count toward graduation requirements. If pass rates have not increased, the state may find itself in the awkward position of having to make further adjustments or postponements to the exam.

GEORGIA

HIGHLIGHTS

- Initial pass rates on the Georgia High School Graduation Tests are high in comparison to other states. However, this may say more about the level of difficulty of standards and testing in Georgia than it does about student achievement.

- By one outside estimate, 12% of Georgia's 12th graders in 2001 did not graduate or receive a regular high school diploma because they did not pass the state's exit exams. If correct, this relatively large number may be due in part to Georgia's policy of testing students in 11th grade rather than in earlier grades, as in many other states.

Georgia's 11th grade students were first tested on the state's current high school exit exam, the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT), in the 1991-92 school year. The class of 1995 was the first cohort of students required to pass these tests to receive a diploma. The GHSGTs are standards-based exams given in five subjects areas: English/language arts, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science. These tests represent the culmination of an extensive student testing system, in which students are tested frequently in a variety of subjects and formats, as shown in the table below.

Georgia State Assessment System, by Grade Level, Subject Area, and Test Type[1]

Subject Area	State Developed Tests (CRCT)	Writing Assessments	National Tests (SAT-9)	GHSGT
Reading	1-8		3,5,8	
English/Language Arts	1-8			11,12
Mathematics	1-8		3,5,8	11,12
Writing		3,5,8		11,12
Social Studies	3-8		3,5,8	11,12
Science	3-8		3,5,8	11,12

[1] Kindergarten students are also tested on the Georgia Kindergarten Assessment Program-Revised (GKAP-R).

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information from http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/index.asp, July 2002.

For further information about the GHSGT, please refer to the Georgia Fact Sheet in the state profiles section of this report.

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Results

The most recent data on initial pass rates for the GHSGT are for the class of 2002.

Percentage of 11th Grade Students Passing the GHSGT on Their First Attempt (2000-2001 School Year Administration)

	English/ Language Arts	Writing	Mathematics	Social Studies	Science
All students	94%	92%	91%	80%	68%
Asian	89%	87%	96%	82%	70%
Black	89%	87%	82%	67%	50%
Hispanic	82%	80%	84%	65%	50%
White	97%	96%	95%	88%	79%
Students with disabilities	68%	63%	57%	44%	32%
English language learners	49%	46%	74%	36%	23%

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information from http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/index.asp, July 2002.

As is the case with most testing programs, the results show gaps in student achievement based on race/ethnicity, language proficiency, and disability status. However, Georgia's results are atypical in several ways.

First, initial exit exam pass rates in Georgia are generally much higher than in other states. In mathematics, for example, 91% of Georgia students passed the exit exam in Spring 2001, compared with 73% in Ohio (2000-01) and 65% in Indiana (2001). However, this significantly higher pass rate does not mean that students in Georgia are better prepared academically than students in other states. In fact, there is evidence to the contrary. Prior to entering high school, 8th grade students in Georgia perform below the national average in reading, mathematics and science on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). At first glance, increased student learning does not appear to explain Georgia's high exit exam scores.

Two possible explanations for this phenomenon come to mind. One explanation is that because Georgia's testing program is so extensive, Georgia students may be more comfortable with the format of the state tests than students are in other states, so they score higher. However, most states spend substantial time preparing for these tests, so this explanation seems unlikely. Another possible explanation is that the content of Georgia's high school exit exams is less challenging than in other states so most students do well on the tests. A recent audit by Phi Delta Kappa International (2002) reported that many of Georgia's standards lack rigor. Since exit exams are aligned to Georgia's standards, the second explanation seems more likely.

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Percentage of Students Scoring Basic or Above on the NAEP, by subject and year tested

	8th Grade Science (1998)	8th Grade Mathematics (2000)	8th Grade Reading (2000)
Georgia	68%	55%	52%
National	72%	65%	59%

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information from http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/index.asp and the National Center for Education Statistics, July 2002.

The second unusual finding is that racial/ethnic achievement gaps are quite different for different subject area tests. For example, the difference in pass rates between white and black students is only 8% on the English/language arts section of the GHSGT, but is 29% in science. The relatively small gaps for some sections of the test suggest a "topping out" effect. In other words, most students do well because those test sections lack rigor or have low cut scores.

Georgia's high initial pass rates do not necessarily translate into a small number of students being denied diplomas because of exit exam scores. While exact figures are not available from the state, Amrein and Berliner (2002) estimate that approximately 12% of Georgia's 12th graders did not graduate or receive a regular high school diploma in four years because they failed to meet the graduation exam requirement in 2001. This contrasts with Ohio and Indiana, where approximately 2% of students were denied diplomas because of graduation exams. If this estimate is correct, this result may be partly because Georgia first tests students in 11th grade. Many states begin exit exams in the 9th or 10th grade, which typically give students more retest opportunities.

Noteworthy Features and Actions

In many ways, Georgia's system of high school exit exams typifies the development of other exit exams across the nation. Georgia exhibits a consistent desire to raise expectations and achievement for its students. Like many states, Georgia works toward this goal by ratcheting up its system of standards and assessments. In no other place can this phenomenon be seen more clearly than in Georgia. The major stages in Georgia's ongoing refinement of its high school exit exams mirror the larger history of exit exams and standards and assessments.

Following the trend of the late 1970's and early 1980's, Georgia high school students began taking a minimum competency exam, the Georgia Basic Skills Test, in 1981. These tests were administered until the students who were 9th graders in 1990-91 graduated in June 1994. Then, at the beginning of the standards-based reform movement, Georgia raised the stakes when Governor Zell Miller's proposal for "fewer but tougher tests" passed the state legislature. In the 1991-1992 school year, the current system of standards-based exams, the GHSGT, was first given to students.

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The latest trend in high school exit exams is end-of-course (EOC) exams. EOC exams are generally considered to be more challenging than standards-based exams like the GHSGT. For 2001-2002, only Texas and New York have EOC exam systems in place, but in the next few years, Georgia and other states will follow suit.

The most recent set of reforms to Georgia's education system, the A-Plus Education Reform Act, was passed in 2000. It will replace the GHSGT with a series of eight EOC exams, in Algebra 1, Geometry, United States History, Economics/Business/Free Enterprise, Biology, Physical Science, Ninth Grade Literature and Composition, and American Literature and Composition. While all eight EOC exams will be administered starting in Spring 2003, the state has not yet determined key details, such as how many of these tests a student must pass, nor has it set a schedule for phasing out the old tests.

Challenges and Issues to Watch

TOUGHER CURRICULUM AND STANDARDS In response to audit findings by Phi Delta Kappa International that many of Georgia's standards lack rigor, state schools Superintendent Linda Schrenko has vowed to revise the state's Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) and standards. Her plan would revise content standards for each area over a two-year period with an additional year for implementation. These revisions will be followed by changes in the state's testing program including realigning the tests to the revised standards. The current plan calls for exams to be realigned and administered in spring 2005, only two years after the first version of EOC exams are given. This constant readjustment may prove difficult for students and teachers and may lengthen the phase-out period for the GHSGT.

THE GEORGIA CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP COMMISSION Like many states, Georgia is beginning to take steps to raise student achievement among minority and poor students. The state's formation of the Georgia Closing the Achievement Gap Commission is an encouraging step toward that goal. The commission is still in the early stages of studying the issue; its first meeting was in Fall 2001.

INDIANA

HIGHLIGHTS

- Among states with high school exit exams, Indiana has assembled one of the most comprehensive sets of programs and policies aimed at promoting student success.

- Indiana courageously chooses to publish detailed information that shows wide variation in student pass rates based on race/ethnicity, poverty, special education status, and English proficiency.

In 1992, Indiana put into law the requirement that high school students must meet Grade 9 standards in English/language arts and mathematics in order to receive a diploma. The primary means of demonstrating that a student has met these standards, the Graduation Qualifying Exam (GQE), was added to law in 1995. The GQE, the 10th grade component of a program called the Indiana Statewide Testing for Education Progress-Plus (ISTEP+), was first administered in the fall of 1997. The class of 2000 was the first cohort of students to be denied diplomas if they did not pass the exam. For further information about the GQE, please refer to the Indiana Fact Sheet in the state profiles section of this report.

Results

Unlike most states, Indiana reports disaggregated student assessment results and detailed information on student graduation rates. The most recent data on initial pass rates for the GQE is for the class of 2004.

Percentage of 10th Grade Students Passing the GQE on Their First Attempt (Fall 2001 Administration)

	English/Language Arts	Mathematics
All students	68%	65%
Asian	72%	79%
Black	38%	31%
Hispanic	49%	46%
White	73%	70%
Free or reduced lunch	45%	42%
Students with disabilities	19%	24%
English language learners	28%	33%

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information from http://doe.state.in.us/. July 2002.

As with other states, the results show wide variations in initial pass rates based on race/ethnicity, poverty, special education status, and English language learner status. On their first attempt, Asian American students were two and a

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half times as likely as black students to pass the mathematics portion of the GQE, and white students were nearly one and a half times as likely as Hispanic students to pass the English/language arts section.

It is unclear as to how these figures will eventually translate into graduation rates for this group of students. Initial pass rates for the class of 2000 were similar. As of June 2001, 98.5% of students in the class of 2000 who completed all the required courses had met the GQE standard and received diplomas, which is surprising given the low initial pass rates.

This high figure is likely due, at least in part, to the fact that students who dropped out or did not complete their coursework were not included in this calculation. However, one should not dismiss the role of Indiana's support programs in the dramatic three-year improvement for the class of 2000.

Noteworthy Features and Actions

Among states with high school exit exams, Indiana has assembled an unusually comprehensive set of policies and programs to help students succeed in and graduate from high school. These policies and programs not only have shown promising results for students but also have helped address legal challenges to Indiana's testing system.

REMEDIATION Enacted in 1995, Indiana's Remediation Grant Program provides funds to school corporations to aid students who have not met state standards as measured by ISTEP+ (in grades 3, 6, and 8) and the GQE. Funding for the program has averaged around $21 million annually, but the legislature appropriated an additional $5 million for the first student cohorts subject to denial of a diploma. As part of the program policy, schools must have a remediation plan for students who do not pass the GQE. However, program design and implementation are fairly flexible. Decisions about the structure of the remediation programs, such as when classes take place (during the school day versus after hours), whether to focus on individual tutoring versus group instruction, and whether preventive remediation will be part of the program, are made locally.

In March 2000, CTB/McGraw-Hill published "An Investigation of Indiana High School Remediation Programs," commissioned by the Indiana Department of Education. The report found that among students who did not pass the 1997 GQE, those who participated in school-sponsored remediation programs made larger average gains on the 1998 retest than those who did not. The report also concluded that Indiana schools were adjusting their curricula to bring them more in line with state standards in an effort to help their students meet the GQE standard.

WAIVERS/APPEALS PROCESS Indiana requires that students demonstrate mastery of the Grade 9 standards that are assessed on the GQE. Since students are required to take the exam, the most straightforward means of demonstrating mastery is through the GQE itself. However, Indiana offers two alternate pathways to a diploma for students who repeatedly fail the GQE.

First, a student can complete all components of the Core 40 curriculum, a more rigorous series of courses than what is generally required, with a grade of C or higher in each course, in order to receive an Indiana diploma. Second, a student may be eligible to graduate through an appeals process if he or she meets the following requirements:

- Takes the exit exam in each subject area that the student did not pass at least once every school year, after the school year in which the exam was first taken.
- Completes remediation opportunities provided by the student's school.
- Maintains a school attendance rate of at least 95%, with excused absences not counting against the student's attendance.
- Maintains at least a C average or the equivalent in the courses specifically required for graduation.
- Obtains a written recommendation from his or her teacher in each subject area that the student did not pass. The recommendation must be approved by the principal and be supported by documentation that the student has attained the academic standard in the subject area.
- Otherwise satisfies all state and local graduation requirements.

Rather than being viewed as ways around the system, these alternatives are generally considered to be more challenging than the GQE and are not widely used. As noted above, 98.5% of the class of 2000 completed all the required courses, met the GQE standard, and received diplomas. Out of these students, 93.7% earned a diploma by achieving a passing score on the GQE, 4.6% earned a diploma through the appeals process, and 0.2% earned a diploma through the Core 40 Waiver.

PUBLIC OUTREACH In Indiana, individuals who are participating in adult secondary education classes and students who leave high school having met all the graduation requirements except passing the GQE may also take the exam to receive a diploma. Indiana's "Take It to Make It" public awareness program reaches out through television, radio, a variety of print materials, and presentations to ensure that both traditional and nontraditional students are aware of testing dates, graduation requirements, and remediation opportunities.

Challenges and Issues to Watch

RENE V. REED In January 2002, the Indiana Supreme Court brought closure to a 1998 lawsuit filed to challenge the GQE requirement as it applies to students with disabilities when the court declined to take the case. In June 2001, the Court of Appeals of Indiana upheld the trial court's finding that the requirement did not violate students' due process rights or their rights under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Smith and Smith, n.d.). The trial court found that Indiana's requirement for remedial assistance made it unlikely that students were not exposed to the material tested on the GQE and that the state was not required to honor accommodations under students' Individualized Education Programs that would invalidate test results, such as

orally reading test questions to students during the reading comprehension section of the test or allowing students to respond to questions in a language other than English.

TOUGHER STANDARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY In 2000, Indiana adopted more rigorous standards, Academic Standards 2000, in all grade levels and subjects. At grades 3, 6, and 8, the ISTEP+ will be aligned to the new standards beginning in Fall 2002. However, the GQE will not assess these new standards until Fall 2004, so that the first cohort of students to take the GQE under the tougher standards will have been previously tested on them in the 8th grade. A decline in GQE pass rates in 2004, while not guaranteed, should not come as a surprise.

Indiana is also revisiting its school accountability system. High schools in all school improvement and performance categories will be required to meet a minimum graduation rate that will vary by category. Rewards and sanctions, including loss of accreditation, will be closely tied to this system. With the baseline year for improvement and performance determinations for high schools quickly approaching in 2004-05, Indiana high schools may give even further attention to the GQE.

NEW YORK

HIGHLIGHTS

- Unlike many states, New York has demonstrated a strong capacity to analyze student achievement data. This capacity enables the state to present rich achievement results and make detailed, research-based policy recommendations.

- The complexity of New York's system of Regents exams makes it difficult for citizens to understand. However, this complexity also allows for adequate phase-in periods for tests and provides more information about student learning.

In 1996, the New York Board of Regents voted to phase out the state's low-level high school exit exams, the Regents Competency Tests. The state began requiring all public high school students to take the more challenging standards-based end-of-course (EOC) exams, the Regents Comprehensive Examinations. These exams previously had been used only to grant the more prestigious Regents Diploma.

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To give students, schools, and districts time to adapt, the state developed a three-year timetable. The new requirement began to take effect on a limited scale with the freshman class of 1996 and would be fully implemented with the freshman class of 1999. (Since some students take more than four years to complete high school, requirements are stated in terms of when students enter high school rather than when they are expected to graduate.)

In practice, the phase-in schedule means that a general education student who entered high school as a freshman in 1996 would have to pass the Regents Comprehensive Examination in English, plus four Regents Competency Tests to graduate. A general education student who entered high school in 1999 will have to pass the five Regents Comprehensive Examinations in English, Mathematics, Global History and Geography, United States History and Government, and Science. Students with disabilities may be eligible for safety net provisions, allowing them to continue to earn a local diploma based on passing the Regents Competency Tests.

The passing scores on Regents exams will also change over time to allow for an adjustment period. During the first two to four years that an exam is required (the period varies by subject), local districts may set a passing score of 55. After this initial period, the passing score will be 65 on all the exams across all districts in the state.

New York still grants differentiated diplomas. However, students must now pass more challenging examinations for the Regents diploma than for a local diploma. For further information about the Regents Comprehensive Examinations, please refer the New York Fact Sheet in the state profiles section of this report.

Results

Reporting results from EOC exams like the Regents is more complicated than with other types of exit exams. Students take these examinations at different times in their high school careers. Reporting results after students have been in high school for the traditional four years is a reasonable option since most students will have graduated by then.

PASSING RATES Because the Regents exam requirement was only recently phased in for all general education students, only limited data on pass rates are currently available. The results below are the four-year pass rates in the Regents English Exam for the 1996 cohort, the first group of students required to take a Regents examination.

Percentage of General Education Students from the 1996 Cohort who Passed the Regents Comprehensive Examination in English after 4 Years

	Current pass score criterion (55 or higher)	Eventual pass score criterion (65 or higher)
General education Students	90%	75%
Students with disabilities	63%	36%
Students in schools with 0%–20% minority populations	98%	88%
Students in schools with 81%–100% minority populations	72%	44%

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information from http://www.nysed.gov, July 2002.

While the higher pass score of 65 for English will not be in place until the freshman cohort of 2000, it is worth noting the difference in the percentage of students passing under these different criteria. If the higher cut score had been in place, 10% fewer students in schools with low minority populations would have passed the English exam, while 28% fewer students in high-minority schools would have passed.

DROPOUTS In Spring 2002, the New York City Board of Education released dropout findings for its students. The city's Division of Assessment and Accountability found that dropout rates are increasing as the new Regents exam requirements take effect. Increases were found for English language learners and for all racial/ethnic groups including white students. While these results do not apply to the entire state, they may be indicative of wider impacts on students.

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Noteworthy Features and Actions

COMPLEXITY OF THE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM In comparison to other states' minimum competency and standards-based exam systems, New York's end-of-course (EOC) exam system is more complex. For example, phase-in of the Regents exams has been staggered over a long period. This staggering eases the transition from one testing system to another. But it can also create a confusing system of graduation requirements that differs from student to student in the same grade level.

Another complex feature of EOC exams is the fact that students in the same cohort may take these exams at different points in their high school careers. The benefit of this system is that students take EOC exams after they have finished the appropriate coursework and feel prepared in the subject matter. However, this flexibility makes it more difficult to report interim results for a cohort of students as they pass through high school. Interim reports for EOC exams include just a subset of students, not an entire cohort.

This variability in test-taking times also makes it harder to track students' progress toward graduation. With only a rough timeline to aim for instead of an exact testing date, students may find themselves having to take an overwhelming number of exams in their final years in high school.

DATA ANALYSIS CAPACITY In New York, the complexities of interpreting and reporting EOC results are mitigated by the state's capacity to track student performance and conduct data analysis. One of the most obvious indications of this capacity is the state's Profile of the Educational System. Most other states' "report cards" do not provide disaggregated student achievement results and only show results from one year. New York not only provides long-term trend data but also disaggregates data by race/ethnicity, poverty, disability status, limited English proficiency, and a variety of school characteristics such as urban status, resource capacity, and concentration of minority students.

New York's ability and will to generate such information enable the state to make policy recommendations based on its own research. For example, the preface to New York's Profile of the Educational System reads:

> Students in more advantaged districts are substantially more likely than students in the less advantaged districts to perform with distinction on Regents examinations and they are more than twice as likely to plan to attend four-year colleges. State aid formulas help to ensure that those districts with the least ability to raise resources locally, on average, receive the largest allocations of aid from the State. However, with few exceptions, the formulas do not consider the extra help in achieving the standards needed by children placed at risk by poverty and limited proficiency in English.

While similar findings may be true in other states, few states produce as detailed student achievement results and needs assessments as New York.

Challenges and Issues to Watch

TESTING BACKLASH New York has experienced significant backlash against the Regents exams and its student assessment program in general. Examples of some groups opposed to the state's assessment system include

- **Students**—Students Against Testing (SAT) works to build local activist student groups to fight standardized tests.
- **Parents**—State Testing Opposed by Parents (STOP) organized a boycott of 8th grade testing in Scarsdale.
- **Schools**—New York Networks for School Renewal fought to use locally developed exams instead of the Regents exams. They were opposed to "forces outside the school . . . significantly governing decisions regarding curriculum guidelines and performance assessments."
- **Districts**—In 2002, the Scarsdale Board of Education issued a detailed list of complaints about New York's assessment system. The Board wrote, "A reliance on testing has not been shown to yield long-term growth in learning or the meaningful education that should be the goal of every school."
- **Other Local and National Organizations**—In 2001, over 25 organizations demonstrated against high-stakes testing in Albany. The list of groups included the United Federation of Teachers, the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities, the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching, and many others.

There is no evidence as to these groups' effectiveness or their impact on New York's testing system. However, other states should be aware of the potential for similar responses in their states and develop plans for better public engagement on testing.

OHIO

HIGHLIGHTS

- Ohio is one of the few states that has begun to address the complex issue of whether to accept other states' high school exit exams.
- As more states start to report disaggregated testing results as Ohio does, the pressure is on to develop plans to narrow achievement gaps among racial/ethnic groups.

Ohio began administering 9th Grade Proficiency Tests in 1990, and the first cohort of students required to pass these tests to receive a diploma was the class of 1994. These tests cover writing, reading, mathematics, and citizenship. With the class of 2001, the state began requiring a science test for graduation. In Spring 2003, the state will begin administering a new, more rigorous set of standards-based exams, the Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT), starting in the 10th grade rather than the 9th grade as the current tests do. For two years, all 10th grade students will take the OGT in reading and mathematics; they are required to pass the 9th Grade Proficiency Tests and complete curriculum requirements in order to earn an Ohio Diploma. The class of 2007 will be the first class that must pass the OGT to graduate. For further information about the OGT, please refer to the Ohio Fact Sheet in the state profiles section of this report.

Results

In Ohio, districts can decide to let 8th grade students take the 9th Grade Proficiency Tests. These data are reported. However, we have chosen to report on the percentage of students who have passed each proficiency test by the end of 9th grade to ensure that we are reporting on all students rather than a subset that took the test early. Thus, the following results are cumulative results for the students who were in 9th grade in 2000-2001, rather than initial pass rates as we have reported on for other states. Since these figures include one to two retesting opportunities, these figures are higher than initial pass rates would be for the state.

Percentage of 2000-2001 9th Grade Students Passing Proficiency Tests by the End of the 9th Grade

	Reading	Writing	Mathematics	Citizenship	Science
All students	91%	92%	73%	83%	78%
Asian	91%	93%	84%	85%	84%
Black	76%	80%	38%	59%	46%
Hispanic	77%	82%	48%	63%	54%
White	94%	94%	79%	87%	85%

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information from http://www.ode.state.oh.us/, July 2002.

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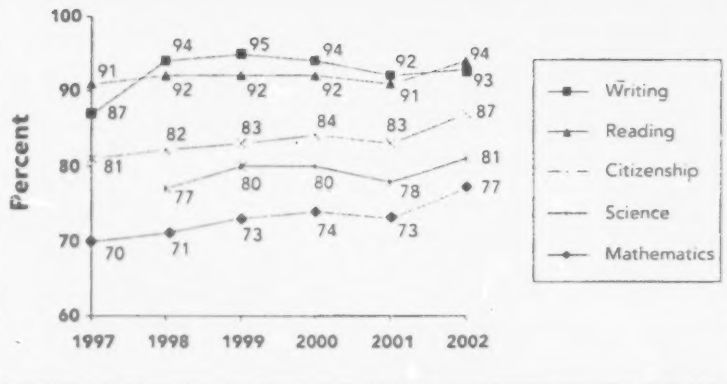
As with many states, pass rates vary widely based on race/ethnicity, especially for mathematics and science. Between white and black students, the pass rates differ by 41 percentage points in mathematics and 39 percentage points in science.

From 1997 to 2002, trend line data show some steady growth in 9th grade cumulative pass rates.

9th Grade Cumulative Pass Rate Trend Lines for the 9th Grade Proficiency Exams, 1997-2002



Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information from http://www.ode.state.oh.us/, July 2002.

Over these six years, writing pass rates have gone up 6%, reading 3%, citizenship 6%, and mathematics 7%. For the five years that the science test has been given, scores have gone up 4%.

Data are not available to assess how these gains have been distributed across racial and ethnic groups over this period. However, Ohio recently reported some encouraging data on improving performance among 8th grade black and Hispanic students taking the exam for the first time. From 2000 to 2002, black students progressed 13 percentage points in reading, 10 points in citizenship, 6 points in writing, and 5 points in mathematics. Over the same time period, Hispanic students had a 16-point increase in reading pass rates, 12 points in citizenship, 9 points in mathematics, and 8 points in writing. With improved data reporting techniques and capability, Ohio will be able to track whether the gaps between racial and ethnic groups continue to shrink.

While the tests' effects on dropout rates in Ohio is uncertain, 98% of students in the Class of 2002 who completed all the required courses passed all five parts of the proficiency exams and received diplomas.

Noteworthy Features and Actions

RECIPROCITY WITH OTHER STATES As more states administer high school exit exams, the issue of how to deal with students who transfer across state lines will become increasingly complex, especially for students who transfer during the middle of their high school years. If a student transfers early in high school,

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it may be reasonable to expect him or her to take and eventually pass the high school exit exam in the new state. For students who transfer late in high school, waivers may be a wise option, because these students would not have been exposed to the new state's standards.

Ohio is one of the few states that has begun to address the more difficult issues surrounding this problem. Ohio has a reciprocity agreement with Maryland regarding the 9th grade mathematics and citizenship tests only. A student who passes the Maryland Functional Testing Programs exam in mathematics and/or citizenship and then moves to Ohio will receive credit in Ohio for the test area(s) passed, and vice versa. The agreement remains in effect until either graduation test is changed. While this is just a start, it brings up the larger issue of deciding whether or not to accept results from other states.

Alaska, for example, has decided to accept results from all other states with high school exit exams. Given that Alaska has a minimum competency exam and only tests in reading, writing, and mathematics, this seems like a relatively easy choice. However, the decision process becomes more difficult for states with standards-based exams or end-of-course exams, or states like Ohio that test in more subjects.

For example, a state with end-of-course exams in Literature and Composition, Algebra I, Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, and American History must decide whether to accept results from a state with minimum competency exams in English/language arts and mathematics and no exams in social studies and science. How should it balance the needs of students against the integrity of its own testing system? This question is not an easy one, and states should initiate efforts to answer it, as Ohio has done.

TESTING PRIVATE SCHOOL STUDENTS Another difficult decision for states is whether or not to require private school students to take the state's high school exit exam. Very few states require nonpublic students to do so. In Ohio, students enrolled in chartered nonpublic schools must take the 9th Grade Proficiency Tests to graduate. The graduating class of 1999 was the first chartered nonpublic class required to pass the four original 9th Grade Proficiency Tests in order to earn an Ohio diploma. Since 2001, both public and chartered nonpublic school students are required to pass a fifth test, science. Indiana also has this requirement.

States have to consider such factors as the expense of testing additional students, the autonomy of private schools, the desirability of holding high expectations for all students in the state, and the reasonableness of expecting all students to pass a high school exit exam if they have not been taught a curriculum based on state standards. In Ohio, students enrolled in chartered nonpublic schools have had slightly higher pass rates than public school students. In 2002, 99% of seniors in these schools and 88% of freshman passed all five exams. Chartered nonpublic schools are able to choose their student body, so this may account for the difference. However, the curricula of these schools are not necessarily aligned to Ohio's academic content standards, so these results are somewhat surprising.

Challenges and Issues to Watch

ACHIEVEMENT GAPS As of December 2001, Ohio was one of only 17 states that reported test results for state tests disaggregated by race/ethnicity (Gehring, 2002). As more states begin releasing this information, the pressure to take action to remedy achievement gaps can grow.

Ohio is one of 22 states recently targeted by the NAACP for not responding to the group's request to submit plans to work on reducing these gaps (Reid, 2002). The state is currently outlining its efforts to address this problem. As more years of disaggregated data are available, the state will be able to gauge more easily its progress in this area.

END-OF-COURSE EXAMS Am. Sub. Senate Bill 1, signed by the Governor in June 2001, charges the state board of education with recommending a plan for developing and implementing a series of end-of-course examinations. These tests are planned to be an alternative to passing the Ohio Graduation Tests, a set of standards-based exit exams, which are currently in development.

Profiles

The Center compiled high school exit exam test policy information for each of the 24 states that currently administer a high school exit exam or are phasing one in. Our information was collected from state legislation, state department of education websites, testing manuals and handbooks, student and parent test information guides, and conversations with state assessment staff. Although the Center made every attempt to ensure that the information is current and up-to-date, test policies are continuously changing for a variety of reasons.

The Center chose to profile one high school exit exam in each state. Eight states (Alaska, Arizona, California, Indiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Utah, Washington) have only one high school exit exam in their history and immediate future. Information for that exam is included in their state profiles. Two states recently replaced an old high school exit exam with a new exam (Louisiana, New York). Their new exam is profiled. Eight states (Alabama, Florida, Maryland, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, Tennessee, Virginia) administered two exams in the 2001-2002 school year: an exam that is being phased out and an exam that is being phased in. For these states, the profile contains information on the exam that is being phased in.

A fourth group of states will replace the exam that was administered in the 2001-2002 school year with a new exam by 2008 (Georgia, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Texas). For these states, the current rather than the upcoming exam is profiled. The exception to this rule is Texas. It will fully implement its new exam in the 2002-2003 school year, so its new exam was profiled.

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Alabama

Alabama has been administering high school exit exams since 1983. The state is currently phasing in the 3rd edition of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE).

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001–2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE) 3rd edition

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Standards-based Exam – aligned to 10th and 11th grade standards

What subjects does the exit exam test?
Reading, language, math, and science. The class of 2004 will be required to pass social studies.

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice ☐ Short Answer ☐ Writing Prompt ☐ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
1983 – First Edition; 1993 – Second Edition; 1999 – Third Edition

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?
1985 – First Edition; 1995 – Second Edition ; 2001 – Third Edition

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
11th grade

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Four opportunities to retest by the end of the 12th grade

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
☐ Waivers ☐ Appeals ☐ Alternate Assessments ■ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
☐ Exemptions ■ Accommodations ☐ Alternate Assessments ☐ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
☐ Exemptions ■ Accommodations ☐ Alternate Assessments
☐ Test(s) in Other Language(s) ☐ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools ■ Districts ☐ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
■ LEA Must Provide ☐ Students Must Attend ■ State Funded ☐ No

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What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?
The exams are scored on a scale of 0-999 and students must score a 563 in reading, 560 in language, 477 in math, 491 in science, and 509 in social studies.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

Pass Rate (2001)	Reading	Language	Mathematics	Science
All students	88%	86%	83%	82%
Asian				
Black				
Hispanic	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
White				
Free or reduced lunch				
Students with disabilities	58%	53%	51%	59%
English language learners				

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- Students can take the ASHGE in the 10th grade as a pre-graduation option to determine areas they have mastered and areas they need to improve before the first official administration of the exam in the 11th grade. If they pass any subject area test in the 10th grade, they do not have to take it again.
- Students can take the math and science sections of the exam after they complete coursework which could be before the 11th grade administration of the exam.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from the Alabama State Department of Education website at http://www.alsde.edu/html/home.asp and state assessment personnel, July 2002.

Alaska

In 2000, Alaska began administering the Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Examination (HSGQE). The HSGQE is a minimum competency exam that tests in reading, writing, and mathematics beginning in the 10th grade. The class of 2004 is scheduled to be the first cohort of students to have diplomas withheld.

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001–2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Minimum Competency Exam

What subjects does the exit exam test?
Reading, writing, and mathematics

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice ■ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt □ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
2000

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?
Class of 2004

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In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
Spring of 10th grade

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Two times yearly in 11th and 12th grades and twice yearly up to three years after leaving high school.

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
■ Waivers ■ Appeals □ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations ■ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions □ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
□ Test(s) in Other Language(s) ■ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools □ Districts □ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
□ LEA Must Provide □ Students Must Attend ■ State Funded □ No

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?
Exams are scored on a scale of 100-600 and students must score a 305 in reading, 356 in writing, and 383 in mathematics. Cut scores will be reset in August 2002.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

Pass Rate (2001)	Reading	Writing	Mathematics
All students	66%	47%	44%
Alaska Native	37%	23%	23%
Asian	52%	39%	38%
Black	44%	29%	20%
Hispanic	52%	34%	30%
White	78%	56%	54%
Free or reduced lunch	34%	20%	19%
Students with disabilities	21%	4%	9%
English language learners	25%	15%	16%

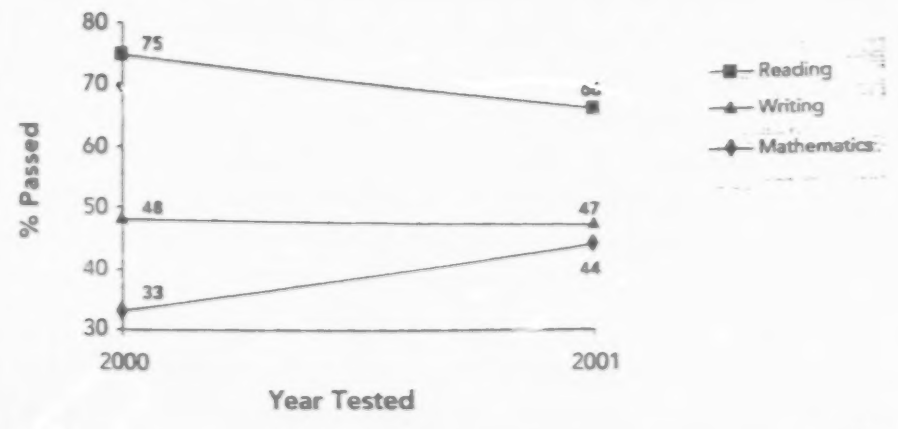
Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- Students who have passed a graduation exam from another state will be awarded an Alaska diploma.
- Students with disabilities may submit a portfolio of student work and behavior in place of passing the exit exam.
- Due to low pass rates on the first administration of the HSGQE, the state adjusted the content level of the exams and delayed denying diplomas from 2002 to 2004.

97

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from Alaska Department of Education and Early Development website at http://www.eed.state.ak.us/ and state education department personnel, July 2002.

Initial Pass Rate Trend Lines for the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam, 2000–2001



Source: Center on Education Policy, 2002.

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Arizona

Arizona has been administering Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) since 1999. However, the state has postponed instituting it as a graduation requirement until 2006, in order to ensure that curricula are aligned to state standards and to allow districts to devise alternate routes to earning a diploma.

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001–2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS)

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Standards-based Exam

What subjects does the exit exam test?
Reading, writing, and mathematics

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice ■ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt ■ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
1999

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?
2006

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
10th grade

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
At least 4 by the end of 12th grade

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
□ Waivers □ Appeals ■ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations ■ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
□ Test(s) in Other Language(s) □ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools ■ Districts □ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
□ LEA Must Provide □ Students Must Attend ■ State Funded □ No

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?
Students must achieve the "Meets the Standard" level in order to be considered passing. The proficiency levels are: Falls Far Below the Standard, Approaches the Standard, Meets the Standard, and Exceeds the Standard.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

Pass Rate (2001)	Reading	Writing	Mathematics
All students	67%	68%	31%
Asian			
Black			
Hispanic	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
White			
Free or reduced lunch			
Students with disabilities			
English language learners			

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- The state is planning to administer an alternate assessment dubbed AIMS Equivalent Demonstration (AIMS ED) for students who have difficulty demonstrating knowledge on standardized tests after the 2004–2005 school year.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from the Arizona Department of Education website at http://www.ade.state.az.us/ and state assessment personnel, July 2002.

California

The California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) was authorized in 1999. The state of California has since delayed implementation of the CAHSEE as a graduation requirement to ensure fairness of the test.

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001–2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Standards-based Exam — English language arts is aligned to 9th and 10th grade standards, and mathematics is aligned to 6th-8th grade standards.

What subjects does the exit exam test?
English language arts and mathematics

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice □ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt □ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
2000–2001 school year

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?
100 2004

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
10th grade

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Seven opportunities – 3 in 11th grade, 3 in 12th grade and once after 12th grade

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
□ Waivers □ Appeals □ Alternate Assessments ■ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions □ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
□ Test(s) in Other Language(s) ■ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools □ Districts □ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
■ LEA Must Provide □ Students Must Attend ■ State Funded □ No

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?
The CAHSEE is scored on a scale that ranges from 250 to 450. Students must score 60% or 350 in English Language Arts or 55% or 350 in math.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

Pass Rate (2001)	English Language Arts	Mathematics
All students	64%	44%
Asian	76%	70%
Black	50%	24%
Hispanic	48%	25%
White	82%	64%
Free or reduced lunch	45%	26%
Students with disabilities	18%	9%
English language learners	28%	17%

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- Students with disabilities are allowed to use accommodations and modifications while testing consistent with their IEP or Section 504 plans. If the student receives the equivalent to a passing score while using a modification that fundamentally alters the constructs of the exam, the district must submit a waiver from the requirement to pass one or both portions of the CAHSEE to the State Board of Education to have that student's score count toward graduation requirements.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from the California Department of Education website at http://www.cde.ca.gov/statetests/cahsee/cahsee.html and state assessment personnel, July 2002.

Florida

Florida is currently phasing out the High School Competence Test (HSCT). The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), which is aligned to Florida's Sunshine State Standards, was field tested in reading and math in 1997 and was implemented in 1998.

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001–2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Standards-based Exam – aligned to 10th grade standards

What subjects does the exit exam test?
Reading and mathematics

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice ■ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt ■ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
1998

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?*
2003

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
10th grade

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Five opportunities to retest by the end of the 12th grade

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
■ Waivers □ Appeals □ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
□ Test(s) in Other Language(s) □ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools □ Districts □ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
□ LEA Must Provide □ Students Must Attend □ State Funded ■ No

* *As noted in the introduction to the state profiles, this class is the first to be affected by the new exam. Students currently in school must pass the old exam.*

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?

Exams are scored on scale of 100-500 and students must score 300 for both math and reading.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

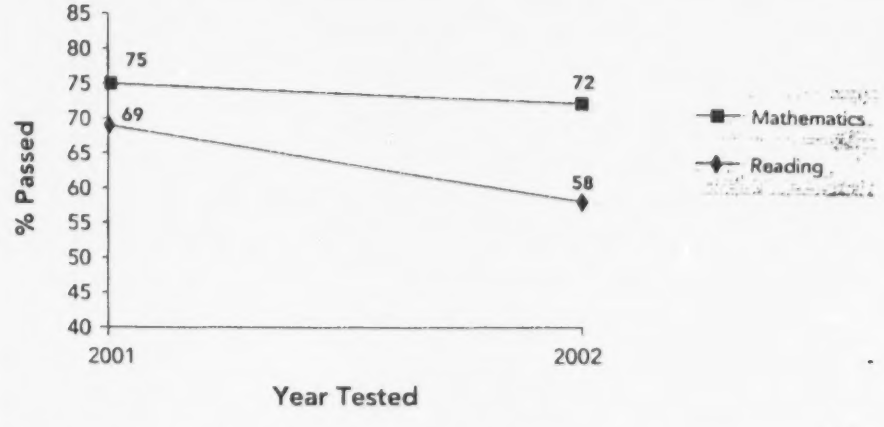
Pass Rate (2002)	Reading	Mathematics
All students	58%	72%
Asian		
Black		
Hispanic	Not Available	Not Available
White		
Free or reduced lunch		
Students with disabilities		
English language learners		

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- While the FCAT has a writing section, passing that section of the exam is not a graduation requirement.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from the Florida Department of Education website at http://www.firn.edu/doe and state assessment personnel, July 2002.

Initial Pass Rate Trend Lines for the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, 2001–2002



Source: Center on Education Policy, 2002.

Georgia

Georgia has a long history of increasing the rigor of its high school exit exams. In the 1991-92 school year, the state replaced its minimum competency exam, the Basic Skills Test, with the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT), a standards-based exam, in the 1991-92 academic year.

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001–2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Georgia High School Graduation Test

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Standards-based Exam – aligned to 11th grade standards

What subjects does the exit exam test?
English/language arts, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice □ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt □ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
1999

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?
1995

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
Fall of 11th grade for writing, spring of 11th grade for the other content areas

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Four opportunities to retest by the end of the 12th grade and unlimited opportunities after leaving high school

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
■ Waivers □ Appeals □ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
■ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
□ Test(s) in Other Language(s) □ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools □ Districts □ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
■ LEA Must Provide □ Students Must Attend ■ State Funded □ No

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?

Students can either pass or fail writing. In the other subject areas, there are 3 performance categories: fail, pass, or pass plus.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

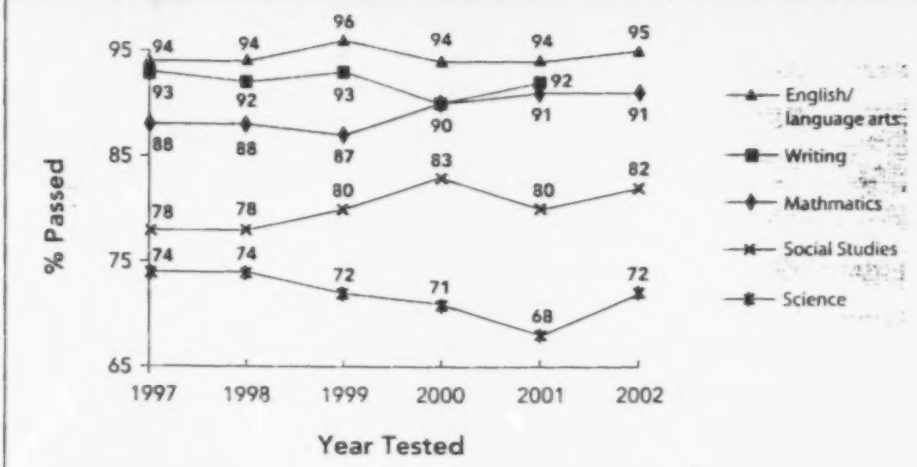
Pass Rate (2001)	ELA	Writing	Mathematics	Social Studies	Science
All students	94%	92%	91%	80%	68%
Asian	89%	87%	96%	82%	70%
Black	89%	87%	82%	67%	50%
Hispanic	82%	80%	84%	65%	50%
White	97%	96%	95%	88%	79%
Free or reduced lunch					
Students with disabilities	68%	62%	57%	44%	32%
English language learners	49%	46%	74%	36%	23%

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- The state is currently developing a series of eight end-of-course (EOC) exams to replace the GHSGT. While all eight EOC exams will be administered starting in Spring 2003, the phase out schedule for the GHSGT has not yet been determined.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from Georgia Department of Education website at http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/index.asp and state education department personnel, July 2002.

Initial Pass Rate Trend Lines for Georgia High School GraduationTest, 1997-2002



Source: Center on Education Policy, 2002.

Indiana

Since 1997, Indiana has been administering a minimum competency exam, the Graduation Qualifying Exam (GQE), to students beginning in the 10th grade. The first graduating class to be denied diplomas was the Class of 2000; in this class, 98.5% of students who met course work and other graduation requirements also met the GQE requirement.

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001–2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Graduation Qualifying Exam – part of the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress Plus (ISTEP+)

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Standards-based Exam – aligned to 9th grade standards

What subjects does the exit exam test?
English/language arts and mathematics

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice ■ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt □ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
1997

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?
Class of 2000

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
Fall of 10th grade

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Four times by the end of the 12th grade and unlimited opportunities after leaving high school

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
■ Waivers ■ Appeals □ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
□ Test(s) in Other Language(s) □ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools ■ Districts □ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
■ LEA Must Provide □ Students Must Attend ■ State Funded □ No

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?
English exams are scored on a scale of 300-800 and students must score a 466 to be considered passing. Math exams are scored on a scale of 300 to 720 and students must score a 486 to be considered passing.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

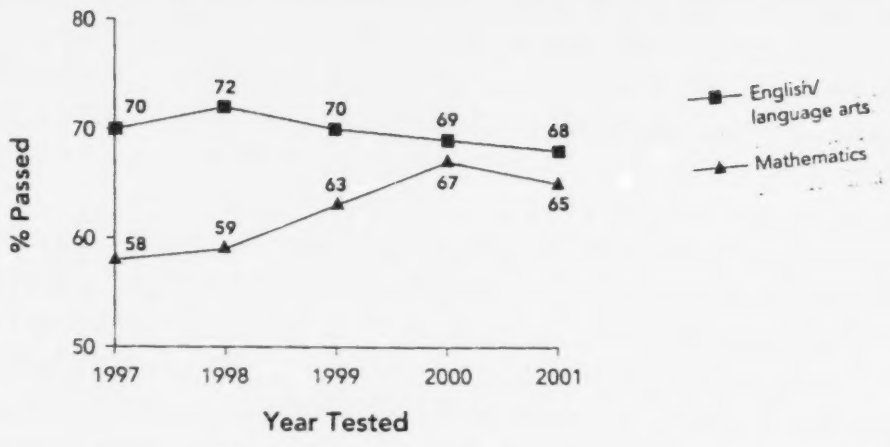
Pass Rate (2001)	English/Language Arts	Mathematics
All students	68%	65%
Asian	72%	79%
Black	38%	31%
Hispanic	49%	46%
White	73%	70%
Free or reduced lunch	45%	42%
Students with disabilities	19%	24%
English language learners	28%	33%

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- Indiana is one of the few states that requires students attending accredited nonpublic schools to take its high school exit exam.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from Indiana Department of Education website at http://doe.state.in.us/ and state education department personnel, July 2002.

Initial Pass Rate Trend Lines for the Graduation Qualifying Exam, 1997–2001



Source: Center on Education, 2002.

Louisiana

Louisiana has had a standards-based exit exam since 1989, the Graduation Exit Exam (GEE). The state recently phased in the 2nd edition of its exit exam, the Graduation Exit Examination for the 21st Century (GEE 21).

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001–2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Graduation Exit Examination for the 21st Century (GEE 21)

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Standards-based Exam

What subjects does the exit exam test?
English language arts and mathematics in spring of 10th grade, science and social studies in spring of 11th grade

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice ■ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt ■ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
2000–2001 math and English language arts; 2001–2002 science and social studies

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?*
2003

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
10th and 11th grades

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Four opportunities for English language arts and math and 2 opportunities for science and social studies by the end of 12th grade.

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
□ Waivers □ Appeals □ Alternate Assessments ■ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
□ Test(s) in Other Language(s) □ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools ■ Districts □ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
■ LEA Must Provide □ Students Must Attend ■ State Funded □ No

** As noted in the introduction to the state profiles, this class is the first to be affected by the new exam. Students currently in school must pass the old exam.*

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?
Students must meet or exceed the Approaching Basic level. There are five achievement levels: Advanced, Proficient, Basic, Approaching Basic, Unsatisfactory.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

Pass Rate (2001)	English/Language Arts	Mathematics
All students	78%	65%
Asian	82%	83%
Black	64%	44%
Hispanic	78%	65%
White	90%	82%
Free or reduced lunch	Not Available	Not Available
Students with disabilities	22%	17%
English language learners	Not Available	Not Available

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- Louisiana law requires that the state's tests should be as rigorous as those of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).
- Students who are in the 10th grade in 2000-2001 are required to take only math and English language arts sections of the GEE 21 and students who are 10th graders in the 2001-2002 school year are required to take math, English language arts, science and social studies sections of the GEE 21 in order to receive a high school diploma.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from the Louisiana Department of Education website at http://www.doe.state.la.us/DOE/asps/home.asp?I=HOME and state assessment personnel, July 2002.

Maryland

Maryland is currently phasing out the Maryland Functional Test, a minimum competency exam. Maryland's new testing program, Maryland High School Assessments (HSA), is a set of end-of-course exams that are aligned to Maryland's standards. Students entering 9th grade in or after Fall 2003 (graduating class of 2007) and middle school students taking high school level courses will be required to take and pass the HSA.

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001–2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Maryland High School Assessment (HSA)

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
End-of-course

What subjects does the exit exam test?
Phase I – English I, Algebra/Data Analysis, Biology, Government, and Geometry. More will be added later.

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice ■ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt ■ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
2001 – 2002
Students entering 9th grade in 2003-2004 school year will be required to pass all of the subject tests except Geometry in order to graduate.

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?*
2007

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
January and May of the year that students complete the course

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Students can retake an assessment after completing a remediation program.

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
□ Waivers □ Appeals □ Alternate Assessments ■ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
□ Test(s) in Other Language(s) □ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools □ Districts □ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
■ LEA Must Provide ■ Students Must Attend ■ State Funded □ No

** As noted in the introduction to the state profiles, this class is the first to be affected by the new exam. Students currently in school must pass the old exam.*

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?
Cut scores have not been set yet, but results will initially be recorded as percentile ranks.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

Pass Rate	English I	Algebra/Data Analysis	Government	Biology
All students				
Asian				
Black				
Hispanic	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
White				
Free or reduced lunch				
Students with disabilities				
English language learners				

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- Maryland plans to implement Phase II Assessments in the future, which will test additional subject areas.
- Although students entering the 9th grade in the 2001-2002 school year will begin taking the HSA, passing the tests is not yet a requirement for this cohort. However, scores will be reported on their high school transcripts as a percentile rank.
- Students will be required to attend a remediation program before they can retake an assessment.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from Maryland State Department of Education website at http://www.msde.state.md.us/ and state assessment personnel, July 2002

Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), a standards-based exam, is the first high school exit exam administered by the state. The MCAS is aligned to the state standards outlined in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001–2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Standards-based Exam – aligned to 10th grade standards

What subjects does the exit exam test?
English and mathematics

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice ■ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt □ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
The test was first administered in 1998, however, the MCAS did not count as a graduation requirement until 2001.

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?
2003

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
10th grade

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Four opportunities to retest by the end of the 12th grade and unlimited opportunities after the 12th grade

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
□ Waivers ■ Appeals □ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations ■ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
■ Test(s) in Other Language(s) □ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools ■ Districts □ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
■ LEA Must Provide □ Students Must Attend ■ State Funded □ No

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What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?
Students must achieve at the "Needs Improvement" level in order to be considered passing. Proficiency levels are: Failing, Needs Improvement, Proficient, and Advanced.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

Pass Rate (2001)	Reading	Mathematics
All students	82%	75%
Asian	79%	84%
Black	59%	46%
Hispanic	51%	41%
White	87%	82%
Free or reduced lunch	Not Available	Not Available
Students with disabilities	46%	39%
English language learners	39%	42%

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- In 2002, students in grades 9 and 10 participated in the Science and Technology/Engineering Question Tryout. Results from this Question Tryout are not reported, and do not count as part of the graduation requirement. Per a vote by the Board of Education, other subject areas will be phased in after districts have had adequate time to implement the *Curriculum Frameworks* in those subject areas.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from the Massachusetts Department of Education website at http://www.doe.mass.edu/ and state assessment personnel, July 2002.

Minnesota

Since 1996, Minnesota has been administering the Basic Skills Tests (BST), a set of minimum competency examinations. The BST is the state's first high school exit exam. Students are tested in math and reading in the 8th grade and in writing composition in the 10th grade.

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001-2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Basic Skills Tests (BST)

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Minimum Competency Exam – aligned to 6th to 8th grade standards

What subjects does the exit exam test?
Reading, math, and writing composition

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice □ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt □ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
1996

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?
2000

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
Reading and math – 8th grade, writing composition – 10th grade

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Eleven opportunities by the end of the 12th grade

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
□ Waivers ■ Appeals □ Alternate Assessments No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations ■ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
■ Test(s) in Other Language(s) □ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools ■ Districts □ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
■ LEA Must Provide □ Students Must Attend □ State Funded □ No

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What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?

Students must score 75% or 600 in reading and math on a scale that tops off at 740. For writing the cut score is 3 on a scale of 0-6.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

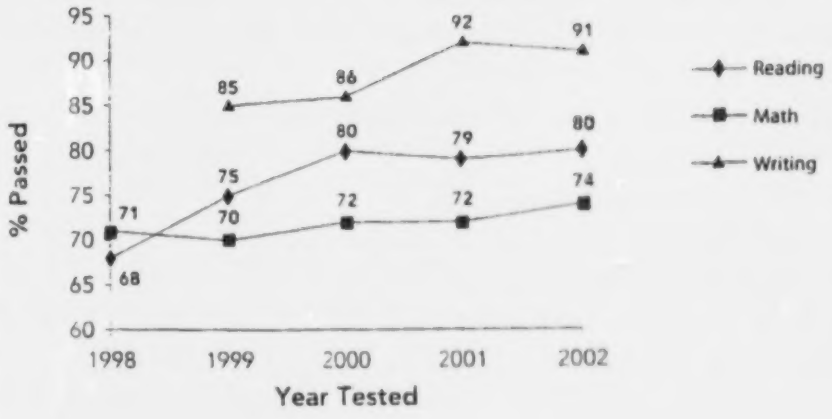
Pass Rate (2002)	Reading	Mathematics	Writing
All students	80%	75%	91%
Asian	61%	62%	79%
Black	46%	33%	62%
Hispanic	52%	43%	70%
White	86%	80%	94%
Free or reduced lunch	59%	51%	77%
Students with disabilities	40%	33%	63%
English language learners	30%	32%	48%

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- Minnesota's interactive online data management system disaggregates school, district, and state test results by grade level, subject area, racial/ethnic group, gender, migrant status, disability status, language proficiency, mobility, and free and reduced lunch.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning website at http://www.educ.state.mn.us/ and state personnel, July 2002.

Initial Pass Rate Trend Lines for the Basic Skills Test, 1998–2002



Source: Center on Education Policy, 2002.

Mississippi

Mississippi is phasing out its minimum competency test, the Functional Literacy Examination (FLE), as it phases in end-of-course examinations, the Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program (SATP).

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001-2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program (SATP)

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
End-of-course

What subjects does the exit exam test?
English II (with a writing component), Algebra, Biology, and U.S. History from 1877

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice ■ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt □ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?

- Students who began 9th grade in school year 1999–2000 must pass the Functional Literacy Examination (FLE) plus the Subject Area Test in U.S. History from 1877.
- Students who began 9th grade in school year 2000-2001 must pass the mathematics section of the FLE plus the Subject Area Tests in U.S. History from 1877 and English II.
- Students who began 9th grade in 2001-2002 must pass the mathematics section of the FLE plus the Subject Area Tests in U.S. History from 1877, English II, and Biology I.
- Students who begin 9th grade in 2002-2003 or after must pass the Subject Area Tests in U.S. History from 1877, English II, Biology I, and Algebra I. This group of students must pass all four Subject Area Tests even if they take the course(s) prior to their 9th grade year.

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?*
2003

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
Students take the exams the year they complete coursework.

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Three times per year by the end of the 12th grade

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
□ Waivers ■ Appeals □ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
■ Test(s) in Other Language(s) □ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools ■ Districts □ No

** As noted in the introduction to the state profiles, this class is the first to be affected by the new exam. Students currently in school must pass the old exam.*

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?

☐ LEA Must Provide ☐ Students Must Attend ☐ State Funded ☐ No

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?

Exams are scored on a scale of 100-500 and students must score a 300 on each subject.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

Pass Rate	Algebra	Biology	English II	US History from 1877
All students				
Asian				
Black				
Hispanic	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
White				
Free or reduced lunch				
Students with disabilities				
English language learners				

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- Students who begin 9th grade in the 2002-2003 academic year will be the first cohort required to pass all the subject area exams of the SATP and no FLE exams.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from the Mississippi Department of Education website at http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/ and state assessment personnel, July 2002.

Nevada

Prior to 1999, students in Nevada were required to pass the state's minimum competency exam. In 1999, Nevada began administration of its new standards-based exam, the Nevada High School Proficiency Examination (HSPE). The HSPE is aligned to the Nevada State Standards.

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001-2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Nevada High School Proficiency Examination (HSPE)

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Standards-based Exam – aligned to 8-12th grade standards

What subjects does the exit exam test?
Reading, writing, and math for graduating class of 2003, science will be added for the graduating class of 2005

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice □ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt □ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
2001-2002

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?*
2003

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
10th grade

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Students have six opportunities to retest by the end of the 12th grade.

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
□ Waivers ■ Appeals □ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
□ Test(s) in Other Language(s) □ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools ■ Districts □ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
■ LEA Must Provide □ Students Must Attend ■ State Funded □ No

** As noted in the introduction to the state profiles, this class is the first to be affected by the new exam. Students currently in school must pass the old exam.*

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?
Yet to be determined

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

Pass Rate	Reading	Writing	Mathematics	Science
All students				
Asian				
Black				
Hispanic	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
White				
Free or reduced lunch				
Students with disabilities				
English language learners				

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- The first version of the HSPE was aligned to Nevada's Course of Study, but was revised to be aligned with the Nevada State Standards for the graduating class of 2003.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from the Nevada Department of Education website at http://www.nde.state.nv.us/ and state assessment personnel, July 2002.

New Jersey

New Jersey is currently phasing out the High School Proficiency Test-11 (HSPT-11), which will be replaced by the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA).

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001-2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA)

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Standards-based Exam – aligned to 11th grade standards

What subjects does the exit exam test?
Mathematics and language arts literacy

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice ■ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt □ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
March 2002

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?*
2003

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
11th grade

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Two times by the end of the 12th grade

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
_ Waivers _ Appeals ■ Alternate Assessments No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
■ Exemptions ■ Accommodations ■ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
■ Exemptions ■ Accommodations ■ Alternate Assessments
■ Test(s) in Other Language(s) _ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
_ Schools ■ Districts _ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
■ LEA Must Provide _ Students Must Attend □ State Funded _ No

** As noted in the introduction to the state profiles, this class is the first to be affected by the new exam. Students currently in school must pass the old exam.*

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?
Students must achieve at the "Partially Proficient" level in order to be considered passing. The proficiency levels are: Advanced Proficient or scaled score of 250, Proficient or scaled score of 200, and Partially Proficient or a scaled score below 200. The scale ranges from 100-300.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

Pass Rate	Reading	Writing	Mathematics	Science
All students				
Asian				
Black				
Hispanic	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
White				
Free or reduced lunch				
Students with disabilities				
English language learners				

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- Students who have not passed all sections of the HSPA by the 12th grade can demonstrate their mastery of the required skills through the HSPA Special Review Assessment.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from the New Jersey Department of Education website at http://www.state.nj.us/education/index.html and state assessment personnel, July 2002.

New Mexico

Since 1986, New Mexico has been administering the New Mexico High School Competency Examination (NMHSCE), which is aligned to New Mexico Content Standards and Benchmarks. Starting in 2003-2004, the state plans to administer a new standards-based exam, the New Mexico High School Standards Assessment (NMHSSA).

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001-2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
New Mexico High School Competency Examination (NMHSCE)

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Standards-based Exam

What subjects does the exit exam test?
Reading, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and writing (composition)

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice ■ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt ■ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
1987–1988

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?
1990

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In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
10th grade

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Four opportunities to retest by the end of the 12th grade

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
■ Waivers ■ Appeals ■ Alternate Assessments No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
■ Exemptions ■ Accommodations ■ Alternate Assessments No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
■ Exemptions ■ Accommodations ■ Alternate Assessments
■ Test(s) in Other Language(s) Yet to be Determined

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools ■ Districts No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
LEA Must Provide Students Must Attend State Funded ■ No

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?

Students must have a scale score of 175 in reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. In writing, students must score a 3 on a scale of 0 to 6.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

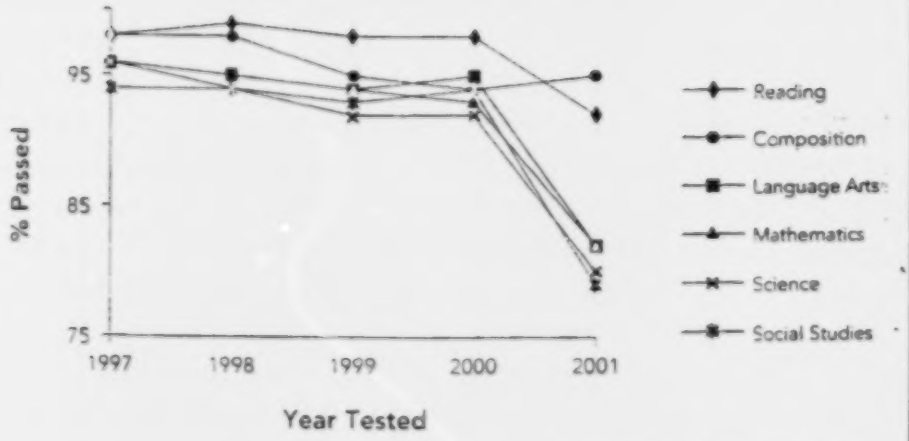
Pass Rate (2000-2001)	All 6 subjects on 1st attempt	Reading	Language Arts	Mathematics	Science	Social Studies	Composition
All students	64%	92%	82%	82%	80%	79%	95%
Asian	77%						
Black	54%	Not	Not	Not	Not	Not	Not
Hispanic	55%	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available
White	83%						
Free or reduced lunch	Not Available						
Students with disabilities	19%	66%	37%	43%	42%	44%	
English language learners	37%	81%	64%	64%	61%	61%	

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- In spring 2001, the cut scores for the exit exam were raised from 150 to 175, which partly accounts for the drop in pass rates in the trend line graph below.
- The state also offers the tests in Spanish.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from the New Mexico Department of Education website at http://www.sde.nm.us/index.html and state assessment personnel, July 2002.

Initial Pass Rate Trend Lines for the New Mexico High School Competency Examination, 1997-2001



Source: Center on Education Policy, 2002.

New York

In 1996, the New York Board of Regents voted to phase out the state's minimum competency high school exit exams, the Regents Competency Tests, and to require all general education high school students to begin taking the more challenging Regents Comprehensive Examinations. The 1999 cohort of 9th grade students is the first required to take end-of-course examinations in English, mathematics, global history and geography, United States history and government, and science.

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001–2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Regents Comprehensive Examinations

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
End-of-course Exams

What subjects does the exit exam test?
English, Mathematics, Global History and Geography, U.S. History and Government, and Science

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice ■ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt ■ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
The first class to be required to take any Regents Comprehensive Exam for a regular diploma was the 1996 cohort of 9th grade students. They were required to take the Regents exam only in English. The other subject Regents exams were phased in as requirements over time. The 1999 cohort of 9th graders has to take all five Regents Comprehensive Exams.

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?
2000, English only. 2003, all five examinations.

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
Students take the exams when they complete coursework.

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Three times per year, as many years as necessary.

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
□ Waivers □ Appeals ■ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
■ Exemptions ■ Accommodations ■ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions □ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
■ Test(s) in Other Language(s) □ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools ■ Districts □ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?

○ LEA Must Provide ○ Students Must Attend ● State Funded ○ No

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?

Passing scores are being raised over time by subject from 55 to 65. Freshman entering in fall 2001 will have to score 65 on all parts of the test.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

Pass Rate in English after 4 Years for Students from the 1996 Freshman Cohort	Current Cut Score Criterion 55 or Higher Correct	Eventual Cut Score Criterion 65 or Higher Correct
General education students	90%	75%
Students with disabilities	63%	36%
Students in schools with 0%–20% minority populations	98%	88%
Students in Schools with 81%–100% minority populations	72%	44%

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- New York has versions of its tests in Chinese, Haitian Creole, Korean, Russian, and Spanish.
- New York accepts results from some nationally administered tests, including the SAT II, Advanced Placement Examinations, and International Baccalaureate Examinations, in place of Regents exams.
- In some situations, students with disabilities can take the state's competency tests rather the Regents exams to fulfill the graduation requirement.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from New York State Department of Education website at http://www.nysed.gov and state education department personnel, July 2001.

North Carolina

Students in North Carolina are currently required to take the North Carolina Competency Test in order to graduate. The state is currently developing a new exit exam, the North Carolina High School Exit Exam, to be administered to students in the spring of 2004.

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001–2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
North Carolina High School Competency Test

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Minimum Competency Exam – aligned to 8th grade standards

What subjects does the exit exam test?
Reading comprehension and mathematics

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
● Multiple Choice ○ Short Answer ○ Writing Prompt ○ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
1994 – 1995

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?
1998

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In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
9th grade

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Five opportunities by end of 12th grade and multiple opportunities up to age 21

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
○ Waivers ○ Appeals ○ Alternate Assessments ● No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
○ Exemptions ● Accommodations ○ Alternate Assessments ○ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
○ Exemptions ● Accommodations ○ Alternate Assessments
○ Test(s) in Other Language(s) ○ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
● Schools ○ Districts ○ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
● LEA Must Provide ○ Students Must Attend ● State Funded ○ No

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?
Students must score at Level III proficiency on both reading comprehension and mathematics. Achievement levels range from I-IV: Level I-Limited Performance, Level II-Not Yet Proficient, Level III-Proficient, Level IV-Exceeds Expectations.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

Pass Rate (2000-2001)	Reading Comprehension & Mathematics
All students	77%
Asian	76%
Black	62%
Hispanic	50%
White	86%
Free or reduced lunch	
Students with disabilities	Not Available
English language learners	

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- North Carolina's new exit exam, currently under development, will be organized into 4 domains that span across the North Carolina Standards Course of Study. Students are expected to apply content knowledge learned over their educational career in each section.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from the North Carolina Public Schools website at http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ and state assessment personnel, July 2002.

Ohio

Since 1990, Ohio's high school exit exams have been the 9th Grade Proficiency Tests. Beginning in Spring 2003, the state will begin administering a new set of standards-based exams, the Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT). For two years, all 10th grade students will take the Ohio Graduation Tests in reading and mathematics; they are required to pass the 9th Grade Proficiency Tests and complete curriculum requirements in order to earn an Ohio diploma. The Class of 2007 will be the first class that must pass the OGT to graduate; they will begin taking the OGT when they are sophomores in March 2005.

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001–2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
9th-Grade Proficiency Tests

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Minimum Competency Exam – aligned to end of 8th grade content

What subjects does the exit exam test?
Writing, reading, mathematics, citizenship (four original test areas) and science (added for the class of 2001)

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice □ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt □ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
1990

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?
First public school class required to pass four original proficiency tests: 1994
First chartered nonpublic required to pass four original proficiency tests: 1999
First public and chartered nonpublic classes required to pass four original tests and science: 2001

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
9th grade. Districts have had the option of testing 8th graders in the spring. That option will no longer be available starting with the 2002-2003 cohort of 8th graders (graduating class of 2007), which will be responsible for passing new graduation tests that reflect end of 10th grade content.

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
At least two times per year by the end of the 12th grade and after leaving high school, plus a special "seniors only" administration in May.

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
□ Waivers □ Appeals □ Alternate Assessments ■ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
■ Exemptions ■ Accommodations Alternate Assessments No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
□ Test(s) in Other Language(s) □ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools ■ Districts □ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?

■ LEA Must Provide _ Students Must Attend _ State Funded _ No

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?

Students must attain a scaled score of 200 in reading, mathematics, citizenship and science and a total score of 5 out of 8 on the writing exam. In 2001, this translated to raw scores of 27 of 40 on reading, 26 of 40 of mathematics, 30 of 50 on citizenship, and 24 of 40 on science.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

These figures represent the cumulative pass rates for 9th graders in 2001 over all the administrations of the examination that they could take in 8th and 9th grade.

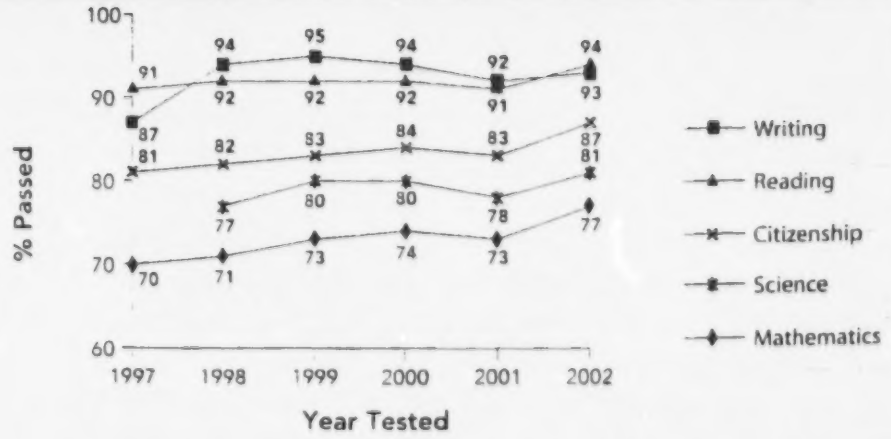
Pass Rate	Writing	Reading	Mathematics	Citizenship	Science
All students	92%	91%	73%	83%	78%
Asian	93%	91%	84%	85%	84%
Black	80%	76%	38%	59%	46%
Hispanic	82%	77%	48%	63%	54%
White	94%	94%	79%	87%	85%
Free or reduced lunch					
Students with disabilities	Not	Not	Not	Not	Not
English language learners	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- Students in chartered nonpublic schools must take the state's high school exit exam.
- The state has a reciprocity agreement with Maryland regarding the 9th grade mathematics and citizenship tests. A student who passes the Maryland Functional Testing Program tests in mathematics and/or citizenship and then moves to Ohio will get credit in Ohio for the test area(s) passed and vice versa. The agreement remains in effect until either graduation test is changed.
- 98% of the Class of 2002 passed all five parts of the proficiency exams.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from Ohio State Department of Education website at http://www.ode.state.oh.us/ and state education department personnel, July 2002.

9th Grade Cumulative Pass Rate Trend Lines for the 9th-Grade Proficiency Exams, 1997–2002



Source: Center on Education Policy, 2002.

South Carolina

South Carolina currently administers the Basic Skills Assessment Program-High School Exit Exam (BSAP), a minimum competency examination

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001–2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP) High School Exit Exam

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Minimum Competency Examination

What subjects does the exit exam test?
Reading, mathematics, and writing

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice ■ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt □ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
1986

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?
1990

130

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
10th grade

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Four opportunities by the end of the 12th grade plus additional opportunities after 12th grade

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
□ Waivers □ Appeals □ Alternate Assessments ■ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions □ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
□ Test(s) in Other Language(s) ■ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
□ Schools □ Districts ■ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
■ LEA Must Provide ■ Students Must Attend ■ State Funded □ No

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?

Students must attain a scaled score of 700 in reading and mathematics and a 3 in writing.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

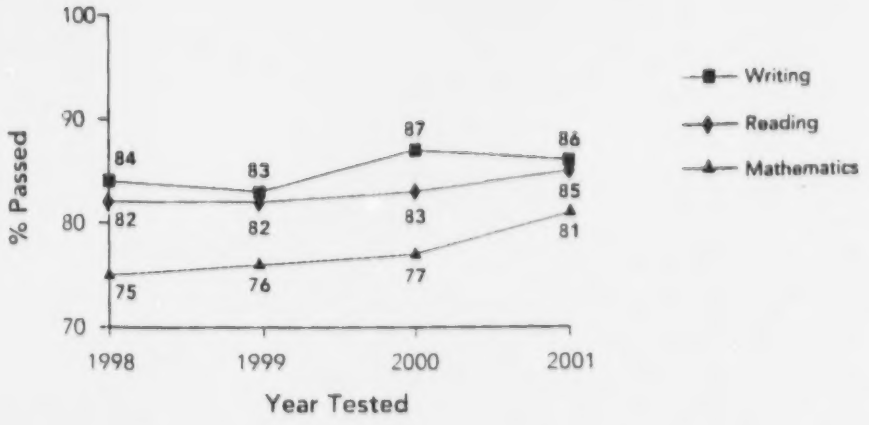
Pass Rate (2001)	Reading	Mathematics	Writing
All students	85%	81%	86%
Asian	87%	91%	83%
Black	74%	67%	73%
Hispanic	74%	72%	74%
White	92%	89%	94%
Free or reduced lunch	72% (free)	67% (free)	72% (free)
	81% (reduced)	75% (reduced)	82% (reduced)
Students with disabilities	49%	51%	57%
English language learners	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- Starting in 2003–2004, the state plans to begin testing high school students using a more rigorous standards-based examination rather than the current minimum competency exam.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from the South Carolina Department of Education website at http://www.sde.state.sc.us/ and state assessment personnel. July 2002.

Initial Pass Rate Trend Data for the Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP) High School Exit Exam, 1998–2001



Source: Center on Education Policy, 2002.

Tennessee

Tennessee is currently phasing out the Tennessee Competency Test and replacing it with the Gateway Examinations. In the 2001-2002 administration, the exams were given as end-of-course exams in Algebra I, Biology I, and English II. In the 2002-2003 school year and after, the exams will be aligned with 10th grade state standards and content from Algebra I, Biology I, and English II. The three subject areas will also be renamed, Mathematics, Science, and Language. Students in the class of 2005 are the first group required to pass the Gateway Examinations.

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001-2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Gateway Examinations

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
End-of-course

What subjects does the exit exam test?
English II, Biology I, and Algebra I

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice □ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt □ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
2001-2002

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?*
2005

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
Year student completes relevant coursework

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Three times each year by the end of the 12th grade

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
□ Waivers □ Appeals □ Alternate Assessments ■ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
□ Test(s) in Other Language(s) □ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools ■ Districts □ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
■ LEA Must Provide ■ Students Must Attend ■ State Funded □ No

** As noted in the introduction to the state profiles, this class is the first to be affected by the new exam. Students currently in school must pass the old exam.*

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?
Students must meet the proficient level in order to be considered passing. The proficiency levels are: Below Proficient, Proficient, and Advanced.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

Pass Rate (Fall 2001)	Algebra I	Biology I	English II
All students	76%	95%	
Asian			
Black			
Hispanic	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
White			
Free or reduced lunch			
Students with disabilities			
English language learners			

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- The new mathematics, science, and language tests will contain content up to the Algebra I, Biology I, and English II levels. Students will continue to take the new exams after completing coursework in Algebra I, Biology I, and English II.
- Although Tennessee will continue to administer end-of-course exams, they will only be used to improve instruction and not for individual student accountability.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from the Tennessee Department of Education website at http://www.state.tn.us/education/ and state assessment personnel, July 2002.

Texas

Texas is currently phasing out the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test and end-of-course exams (EOC). Students who were in the 10th grade in the 2001-2002 school year were the last cohort of student to take TAAS and EOC exams. The Texas Assessment of Knowledge & Skills (TAKS) will be administered to this same group of students in their 11th grade year, but it is not a graduation requirement for them.

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001–2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Standards-based Exam

What subjects does the exit exam test?
English language arts, math, social studies, and science

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice ■ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt □ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
2002-2003

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?*
2005

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
11th grade

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Not yet determined

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
□ Waivers □ Appeals □ Alternate Assessments ■ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
□ Exemptions □ Accommodations ■ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions □ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
□ Test(s) in Other Language(s) ■ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools ■ Districts □ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
■ LEA Must Provide □ Students Must Attend □ State Funded □ No

** As noted in the introduction to the state profiles, this class is the first to be affected by the new exam. Students currently in school must pass the old exam.*

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?
Not yet determined

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

Pass Rate	English/Language Arts	Mathematics	Science	Social Studies
All students				
Asian				
Black				
Hispanic	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
White				
Free or reduced lunch				
Students with disabilities				
English language learners				

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- When the Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) committee exempts a student with a disability from exit-level testing, the committee must choose alternate assessment(s).
- A one-time Limited English Proficient (LEP) deferral is allowed for recent immigrants who may postpone the initial administration of the exit-level test.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from the Texas Education Agency website at http://www.tea.state.tx.us/ and state assessment personnel, July 2002.

Utah

Utah recently piloted its first high school exit exam, the Utah Basic Skills Competency Test. The first official administration will take place in 2003, and the class of 2006 will be the first group required to pass the examination to graduate. The exam will be aligned to the Utah State Core Curriculum.

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001–2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Utah Basic Skills Competency Test (UBSCT)

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Minimum Competency Exam

What subjects does the exit exam test?
Reading, writing, and mathematics

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice ■ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt □ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
February of 2003

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?
2006

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
10th grade

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Four times by the end of the 12th grade. Students can go through an adult education program after the 12th grade to retest.

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
□ Waivers □ Appeals □ Alternate Assessments ■ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations ■ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
■ Test(s) in Other Language(s) □ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
□ Schools □ Districts ■ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
□ LEA Must Provide □ Students Must Attend □ State Funded ■ Yet to be Determined

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?
Yet to be determined

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

Pass Rate	English/Language Arts	Mathematics	Science	Social Studies
All students				
Asian				
Black				
Hispanic	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
White				
Free or reduced lunch				
Students with disabilities				
English language learners				

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- Students can transfer a passing exit exam score from another state.
- A math test will be developed in Spanish.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from Utah State Office of Education website at http://www.usoe.k12.ut.us/eval/bsct/ and state assessment personnel, July 2002.

Virginia

Virginia is currently phasing out the Literacy Passport Test (LPT), which will be replaced by the Standards of Learning (SOL) end-of-course tests. The class of 2004 is the first group of students required to pass these exams to graduate. The SOL end-of-course exams are aligned to Virginia's Standards of Learning.

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001–2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Standards of Learning End-of-Course Exams

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
End-of-course

What subjects does the exit exam test?
Students in the 9th grade class of 2000-2001, 2001-02, and 2002-03 must pass the English: Writing test and the English: Reading Literature and Research test as well as four other end-of-course subtests of the students choosing in mathematics, history, or science. Beginning with students entering the ninth grade in 2003-04, students must pass the two end-of-course English tests, one test each in mathematics, history, and science, and one test of their own choosing to earn a standard diploma.

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
■ Multiple Choice □ Short Answer ■ Writing Prompt □ Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
1998

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?*
2004

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
Varies depending on when students complete coursework

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Three opportunities each year by the end of the 12th grade

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
□ Waivers □ Appeals □ Alternate Assessments ■ Yet to be determined

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments □ No

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions ■ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
□ Test(s) in Other Language(s) □ No

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
■ Schools □ Districts □ No

** As noted in the introduction to the state profiles, this class is the first to be affected by the new exam. Students currently in school must pass the old exam.*

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?

_ LEA Must Provide _ Students Must Attend ■ State Funded _ No

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?

Exams are scored on a scale of 0-600 and students must score 400 (Proficient) in order to be considered passing. Proficiency levels are: Below Proficient, Proficient, and Advanced.

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

Pass Rate (2001)	English: Reading & Literature & Research	English: Writing
All students	82%	84%
Asian	85%	87%
Black	70%	72%
Hispanic	74%	77%
White	87%	89%
Free or reduced lunch	Not Available	Not Available
Students with disabilities	43%	43%
English language learners	57%	55%

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- The state offers end-of-course exams in the following subjects: Math (Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry), Science (Earth Science, Biology, Chemistry), History (U.S. History, World History I, World History II, World Geography).
- Students can substitute results from tests such as the SAT II, Advanced Placement exams, and International Baccalaureate Exams for some EOC exams.

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Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from the Virginia Department of Education website at http://www.pen.k12.va.us/ and state assessment personnel, July 2002.

Washington

The Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) was administered in 2001 for the first time. Students will not have to pass this exam in order to receive a diploma until the graduating class of 2008.

What is the name of the state high school exit exam that was administered in the 2001–2002 school year, or of the exam that will be administered in the 2002-2003 school year?
Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)

Is the exam minimum competency, standards-based, or end-of-course, and to what grade level standards is the exam aligned?
Standards-based Exam –10th grade standards

What subjects does the exit exam test?
English language arts and mathematics

What type(s) of test questions does the exit exam include?
● Multiple Choice ● Short Answer ● Writing Prompt ● Extended/Performance Task

When will/did the state first administer the exit exam to all students in the grade level tested?
1999 on a voluntary basis
2001

What was the first year in which diplomas were/will be withheld as a result of not passing the exam?
2008

In what grade(s) are students first tested using this exit exam?
10th grade

Do students have opportunities to retake the exam or sections of the exam if they fail on the first administration? If so, how many opportunities?
Not yet determined

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for general education students?
□ Waivers □ Appeals □ Alternate Assessments ● Yet to be Determined

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for students with disabilities?
□ Exemptions □ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments ● Yet to be Determined

Are there alternate routes to a regular diploma for English language learners?
□ Exemptions □ Accommodations □ Alternate Assessments
□ Test(s) in Other Language(s) ● Yet to be Determined

Are there additional accountability consequences for schools and districts linked to student performance on this exit exam?
● Schools ● Districts □ No

Does the state require local education agencies to provide remediation services for students who do not pass the exit exam? Are students required to attend remediation programs? Does the state fund remediation services?
□ LEA Must Provide □ Students Must Attend □ State Funded ● Yet to be Determined

What are the cut scores and performance categories for the exit exam?

Not yet determined

What are the most recently available initial pass rates for the test, disaggregated by the student groups listed below?

Pass Rate	English/Language Arts	Mathematics
All students		
Asian		
Black		
Hispanic	Not Available	Not Available
White		
Free or reduced lunch		
Students with disabilities		
English language learners		

Additional points of interest in the state's high school exit exam system:

- Exit exam scores are currently used for school improvement in Washington.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from the office of Superintendent of Public Instruction website at http://www.k12.wa.us/ and state assessment personnel, July 2002.

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